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MEDITATIONS

ON

THE MOST BLESSED VIRGIN.

BY

MOST HON. BROTHER PHILIPPE,

SUPERIOR-GENERAL OF THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS.

Translated from the French.

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Approbations.

Being officially assured that the work entitled "Meditations on the Most Holy Virgin, by the M. H. Brother Philippe, Superior-General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools," will prove a new and most precious fountain from which pious souls may be abundantly supplied with the healing waters of devotion to the Mother of God, its publication in the diocese of Versailles is hereby approved.

Given at Montech, this 18th day of May, 1868.

D. BOUIX,
Vicar-General of the Right Rev'd Bishop of Versailles.

IMPRIMATUR.

✠ JACOBUS R.

ARCHIEP. BALT.

Baltimori, 20 Junii, 1873.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE faithful children of the Church, throughout the Catholic world, as well as every true religious, cherish the devotion to the Most Holy Virgin, strive to obtain its true spirit and observe all the practices it enjoins, because they feel that this devotion satisfies the innermost wants of the soul, opens up an unfailing fountain of divine grace, and procures for us the purest — the most inexpressible joys.

Among the most efficacious means which our Holy Mother the Church has instituted to promote and foster this devotion in our souls, there is none more beneficial in its effects and influence than the holy practice of regular and daily meditation on the prerogatives, the life, the virtues, the glorious mission of Mary; of contemplating, by the light of faith, the Most Blessed Virgin, the master-piece of the Creator, the model of all virtues, the exalted Mother of the Incarnate Word, the Queen of Heaven, raised in glory far above the cherubim, yet, tenderly hearkening to our supplications, shedding around us the love of her own heart, accepting our humble offerings, and bestowing upon us those celestial treasures which flow through her as the channel of divine mercy.

It is impossible to meditate on the attributes of Mary without being filled with the most intense desire to honor her name and invoke her intercession so to live as to merit her protection now, that hereafter we may participate in her glory. Who can behold her in any one of the aspects in which she presents herself to our piety without experiencing, in his heart, the love of the most exalted virtue?

The object of the present work is to render some aid in the proper performance of this holy and salutary exercise. We shall consider in order: 1. The life of the Most Blessed Virgin

Mary. 2. Her virtues. 3. Her exalted greatness and her patronage. 4. The devotion of which she is the object.

The Meditations will be sufficiently numerous: 1. For all the Feasts of the Most Blessed Virgin. 2. For every day in the month of Mary. 3. For the Saturdays on which no particular feast occurs.

To the general Table of Contents we subjoin a list of Meditations for the Feasts, and a series of subjects which we deem appropriate for the month of Mary, merely remarking, however, that this is designed as a simple indication only, leaving each person to modify it according to his own discretion, as his piety or particular necessities may suggest. We recommend for Saturdays those meditations which contain reference to the particular period of the ecclesiastical year at which they may be used. For example, during Advent, the subjects 1, 6, 8, 12, may be selected; from Christmas to the Purification 13, 14, 16, 20, 21. This object will be much facilitated by reference to the general table.

As a valuable assistance in preparing the meditation and in guarding against distractions during this holy exercise, we earnestly recommend frequent use of the book of Résumés. We would also remind the pious Christian that to meditate with profit on the Most Blessed Virgin, we must endeavor to excite in our souls sentiments in harmony with the thoughts which the meditation presents, or with those which Mary herself may be supposed to have experienced. Let us bless God for the graces He has vouchsafed to lavish upon her; let us admire her greatness and her prerogatives; let us felicitate her on her virtues; thank her for her protection; love her with the tenderest love and with the most perfect devotion.

Let us rejoice in her joys and sympathize in her sorrows; let us desire nothing but what she desires; propose nothing but what she proposes; so that our hearts may beat in perfect unison with the immaculate heart. Oh! how profitable will our meditation then be. How much will it contribute to advance us in the virtues of our holy state; to render us more worthy of the favor and protection of our good Mother, and keep us steadfast, to the end of our lives, in that narrow path that leads to life eternal.

And now, O Blessed Mother, prostrate at thy sacred feet, with the most fervent desire and the fullest confidence that thou wilt hear my supplication, I beseech thee, Most Holy Virgin, to accept this work, which has been undertaken solely for the glory of God, thy honor, and the salvation of souls; and grant that its objects may be fully attained. Bless thy poor servant who, alas! has but this humble offering to present to thee, and who is but too sensible of the feebleness of his powers in the presence of so grand a theme. Bless each one of his brethren, whose sanctification he so ardently desires, as well as all who may make use of this book. Oh! sweet and loving Mother, obtain for us all the grace whereby we may prove ourselves thy worthy children and merit thy powerful protection through life, and especially at the hour of our death.

B. PHILIPPE.

MAY 24, Feast of our Lady "Help of Christians," 1863.

MEDITATIONS

ON THE

MOST BLESSED VIRGIN.

I.—MARY PREDESTINED TO BE THE MOTHER OF GOD.

I was set up from eternity and of old before the earth was.—PROV. viii. 23, 24.

CONSIDERATION.

THE Most Holy Virgin, whom our Lord had selected and prepared from all eternity to be the Mother of the Incarnate Word, has been chosen to be the associate in the work of our redemption, the Mother of men regenerated through Christ, the Queen of Angels, and the highest among the Saints.

"You are truly, O Mary," exclaimed St. Bernard, "the daughter predestined by the Most High to be the Mother of Him who is raised above all and blessed throughout all the ages." In the order of the Divine plans, the Incarnate Word occupies the first place, but the second is assigned to the Blessed Virgin of whom He was to be born, whose coming He will Himself announce by a succession of prophecies; whose soul He will adorn with the greatest profusion of His love, and with a full consciousness of His own dignity; and whom He will make the associate of His sorrows on earth, and of His glory in Heaven.

What ideas of the greatness of Mary do not these reflections inspire? She lived, in the Ages of Ages and before all creation, in the thoughts of the Eternal, who distinguished her from the whole human race, and assigned her an incomparable destiny, so that she may say, in the words of Wisdom which the Church ascribes to her: "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways, before He made anything from the beginning. . . . The depths were not as yet, and I was already conceived; . . . before the hills I was brought forth. . . . When He prepared the heavens I was present; when with a certain law and compass He enclosed the depths, when He established the sky above, and poised the fountains of waters, . . . when He balanced the foundation of the earth, I was with Him, forming all things." *

"God, in His eternal prescience, foresaw, at the same moment, the creation, the fall of man, the redemption. He likewise beheld, while creating Adam, Jesus, who was to redeem him with His precious blood; and, while creating Eve, He beheld Mary, who was to repair the transgression of the first woman. O Mary, you are truly the 'Morning Star,' for you arose not only over the creation of the world, but over eternity itself. How this first dawning of faith, in exalting your greatness, elevates my thoughts and rejoices my soul! How I love to contemplate God gazing, with a most benign complacency, upon your future destiny, which He unites with that of His adorable Son. He beholds in you, of all possible creatures, the most beautiful, the most holy, the most amiable, the most generous, the most heroic, the most perfect — in a word, His *one*,† as He Himself calls you. He associates you in His thoughts with the work of the world's redemption." ‡

Mary is, then, a creature by herself, justly called the eldest daughter of the Most High, as Jesus Christ, the divine

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* 1 Prov. viii. 22–30. † Cant. vi. 8. ‡ Mgr. Pavy.

Word, is called "the first-born among many brethren."* God, from the fact of her destiny alone, and independently of her own acquired merits, has raised her to a degree of greatness immeasurably above all celestial intelligences, even those most nearly approaching Himself.

"O Lord!" exclaimed Cardinal de Berulle, "you associate Mary with Yourself; you designate her to cooperate with you in accomplishing the greatest of all works. Even in this alone, you afford me the most abundant reason to contemplate her, with reverence, as the most holy creature, the most worthy of your majesty and of your love, as exalted above all human and angelic eulogies."

The Most Holy Virgin, living in the eternal thoughts of God, must also have lived in the faith of the human family long before she was given to the earth, or rather from the beginning of the world. With her divine Son, she was announced, foretold, represented under symbolic figures; and she thus filled, with her greatness, the succession of ages from the fall of man to the nativity of the Saviour.

Scarcely had Adam and Eve sinned, when God accepted their repentance, and promised them a Redeemer; but even before designating who that Redeemer would be, He announced to them the person through whom He would be given. Addressing the serpent that seduced Eve, He said: "I shall put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed; she shall crush thy head and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel."† According to the concurrent opinion of all the commentators, this woman is Mary, who, from that time, became the hope of fallen humanity, and the central object of the desires and prayers of Adam and Eve and their unhappy posterity.

The remembrance of this Virgin, from whom the Redeemer was to come, was always kept alive by remarkable objects or distinguished persons of a symbolical or prefigurative character, or by the prophecies. How many just men, under the old law, illumined by light from on high, beheld her in the Tree of Life, in Jacob's Ladder, in the Burning Bush, in the Tabernacle, or Ark of the Covenant? And how many more still, in the holy women who were the honor of the people of God — Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Debora, Ruth, Anna, mother of Samuel, Judith, Esther — all of whom represented Mary in some one of her wonderful attributes.

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* Rom. viii. 29. † Gen. iii. 15.

"What Moses," says St. Bernard, "beheld in the burning bush, Aaron in his rod that blossomed, Gideon in the fleece of wool that came forth filled with dew in the midst of dryness and dry in the midst of dew; Solomon, more distinctly, saw in his valiant woman, whom he describes as being above all price; and Isaiah, more clearly still, in the Virgin conceiving and bringing forth a God."

But not only was Mary the object of the longing desires of the children of Israel, she was also most earnestly looked for by many people of antiquity, who, discerning some faint glimmerings of the truth in the traditions of primitive revelation which had come down to their day, or enlightened by what they might have heard concerning the teachings of the inspired writers, expected her in the future, and paid her, in anticipation of her advent, the honors of such worship as they were accustomed to give to their own deities.

O Holy Virgin, proclaimed blessed even by the generations that preceded thee, what eulogy can reach thy exalted greatness! I only begin to consider the immensity of thy graces, and already my thoughts become powerless and my conceptions tremble before the realities I behold. Ah! why do I not possess the intelligence of the celestial spirits, that I may be less overwhelmed with the splendor of thy glory! or, why have I not, at least, their sentiments, that I may the more worthily render thee the homage of my veneration!

APPLICATION.

On one occasion, holy Chantal requesting her Sisterhood to offer up a prayer to the Virgin for her, one of the sisters asked: "What prayer shall we offer?" "My daughter," she replied, "the most powerful, as well as the most acceptable prayer we can address to the Most Holy Virgin, is, to give praise to God for the great abundance of heavenly gifts with which He endowed her, and for having chosen her to be the Mother of the Incarnate Word." In unison with the thought of that sanctified soul, let us glorify God and praise Him with the deepest emotions of gratitude and love for the favors of election and grace which He has lavished upon Mary.

Let us celebrate the wonderful greatness of this august Virgin in union with the faithful Angels who, from the beginning of time, have exalted and blessed her. Let us join our voices with those of the whole choir of blessed Saints of the new Covenant, for all unite in that concert of praise which is continually ascending from every quarter of the earth to the throne of Mary.

With these, let us dedicate ourselves to her honor. Let us be her servants and the Apostles of that devotion which has Mary for its object. Let us heartily offer to her the homage of our piety. Let nothing be dearer to us than to supplicate Mary, to have her sweet name ever on our lips, and to promote, so far as we can, the knowledge, love, and devotion of her, through whom the Author of all grace has been given to the world, and the waters of divine mercy continue to flow throughout the earth.

PRAYER.

How delightful it is to me, O Mary, to contemplate God fore-ordaining you from all eternity to be the Mother of His Son, and to hear, in Heaven, the angelic choir, and, on earth, the generations of all ages of the world, re-echo your praise. Permit me to join in this concert to your glory; and grant that, penetrated with sentiments of confidence and love, I may continue, through life, your faithful servant, honoring you, in an especial manner, by imitating your virtues, and thus rendering myself worthy of participating in your glory.

See *Résumés*, page 412.

2. — THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

There is not a spot in thee.—CANT. iv. 7.

CONSIDERATION.

GOD, when He foresaw, from all eternity, the most sorrowful ruin of the human race to follow from the transgression of Adam, and, in His infinite mercy, determined to restore it more happily by the Incarnation of the Word, from the beginning, and before ages, chose and ordained a Mother for His only-begotten Son, of whom, made flesh, He should be born in the fulness of time. Wherefore, far above all the Angelic Spirits, and all the Saints, He so wonderfully endowed her with the abundance of all the heavenly gifts, drawn from the treasure of divinity, that she might be ever free from every stain of sin, and all fair and perfect, and might possess that plenitude of innocence and holiness, than which, under God, none is greater, and which, except God, no one can reach even in thought." *

"By a special grace and privilege of God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ her Son, the Redeemer of mankind, Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, preserved free from the stain of original sin." † This has been most piously professed by the faithful of Christ from the very dawn of Christianity. It is the belief of the Church, and is now defined and promulgated as a dogma of Catholic faith.

"The fathers and writers of the Church, when they re-

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* Bull promulgating the dogma. † Ibid.

volved in their hearts and minds that the Most Blessed Mary, in the name and by the order of God himself, was proclaimed full of grace by the Angel Gabriel, when announcing her most sublime dignity of Mother of God, have taught that, by this singular and solemn salutation, never heard on any other occasion, is shown that the Mother of God is the seal of the divine graces, and adorned with all the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Yea, the infinite storehouse and inexhaustible abyss of the same gifts." *

"The same doctors have taught that, in this divine oracle, 'I will place enmity between thee and the woman, thy seed and hers,' God clearly and openly pointed out the merciful Redeemer of the human race, and that His Most Blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary, was designated, and, at the same time, that the enmity of both against the serpent was clearly expressed. Wherefore, as Christ, the Mediator of God and man, having assumed human nature, blotting out the handwriting of the decree which stood against us, fastened it triumphantly to the cross, so the Most Holy Virgin, bound by a most close and indissoluble chain to Him, exercising with Him and through Him eternal enmity against the malignant serpent, and triumphing most thoroughly over the same, has crushed his head with her immaculate foot." †

"It was becoming that she should gain a most complete triumph over the ancient serpent — the Mother, so venerable, to whom God the Father gave His only Son, whom, begotten from His own bosom, and equal to himself, He loved as himself, in such a manner that He would be, by nature, one and the same common Son of God the Father and of the Virgin, and whom the Son Himself chose to make substantially His Mother, and from whom the Holy Ghost willed and operated that He should be conceived and born from whom He himself proceeds." ‡

The Virgin ordained to be the Mother of God must shine

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* Bull promulgating the dogma. † Ibid. ‡ Ibid.

with such resplendent purity that he whose eyes could detect spots in the sun itself can truly apply to her these words of the Canticles: "Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee." * "As the Only-Begotten has a Father in Heaven whom the Seraphim extol as thrice holy, so He should have a Mother on earth who never should want the splendor of holiness," and to whom, in reference to the law of the transmission of original sin, He could say, in the words of Assuerus to Esther, "This law is not made for thee." †

The virtue of the blood of our redemption purifies us after our birth; in St. John the Baptist it ascended higher and sanctified him before he was born; in Mary it was manifested in a manner still more perfect by going up until it reached her very first origin. "Through Jesus Christ," says St. Bonaventura, "men are restored to grace after they have sinned; but Mary was so bountifully endowed with every grace that she could not sin." It was meet that He who was to deliver men from the bondage of sin, should first preserve His Mother from the stain of original sin.

No, no, He who came on earth to destroy the power of Satan, could not suffer the evil one to possess, even for an instant, the Most Blessed Virgin, from whose blood, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, His sacred body was to be formed. Our senses would recoil in horror from the very thought that Mary was not all pure, all perfect, all holy, so repugnant is it to our conceptions of the goodness of the Son, and the pre-eminent holiness of the Mother.

As Mary is the worthy Spouse of the Holy Ghost, He hath endowed her with every perfect gift, and munificently robed her with the garment of holiness, as the Church reminds us when applying to her the words of the prophet Isaiah: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, and my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the

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* Cant. iv. 7. † Esther xv. 13.

garments of salvation, and with the robe of justice He hath covered me." *

Mary is the Queen of angels, of those messengers of the Most High who were created in justice and holiness; and she is as much exalted above them as the divine Maternity is more excellent than the functions assigned to the angelic host. Do we not then perceive that she must be superior to them in every respect, and that her origin must be holier even than theirs?

Mary is blessed among women, as proclaimed by the Angel Gabriel and Saint Elizabeth. She is, then, blessed above Eve, who was created in justice and innocence, and consequently must have been, from the first moment of her conception, purer and holier than our first Mother when she came forth from the hands of her Creator. Yes, Mary was conceived without sin, and it was, in an especial manner, of this blessed privilege the holy Fathers spoke, when they called the Mother of God a lily among thorns, earth entirely untouched, a most sweet paradise of innocence, immortality and delights planted by God Himself, and fenced from all snares of the malignant serpent; incorruptible branch that the worm of sin hath never injured, fountain ever clear and sealed by the virtue of the Holy Ghost; a holy temple, a tabernacle prepared by God; the ark and house of sanctification, which Eternal Wisdom built for Itself; the bright morning star; the white dove; the new Eve, who, always pure, always immaculate, brought forth Emmanuel.

APPLICATION.

Let us celebrate the super-eminent privilege with which Mary was favored. Let us praise the Lord, who made her worthy of the exalted destiny to which He called her. Oh, if the angels rejoiced when God poised in the firmament the sun which gives us light, what must have been their

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* Isaiah lxi 10.

transports of joy when He gave Mary to the world — that bright Morning Star, more beautiful than the heavens! Like them, let us rejoice, and unite, with the Church, in exclaiming: * "Thou art, O Mary, the glory of Jerusalem, the joy of Israel, the honor of thy people!" † They have spoken glorious things of thee, because He, who is all-powerful, has done great things for thee! Thy garments are white as snow; thy face resplendent as the Sun."

Let us honor in her birth the Most Immaculate Virgin, who crushed the head of the malignant serpent. Under her guidance and protection, let us courageously struggle against the enemy of our salvation by preserving our soul pure from sin, and our heart free from every disorderly affection. To this end, let us devoutly ask her assistance, saying, with the Church: "Draw us to thee, O Immaculate Virgin! We will run after thee to the odor of thy ointments." ‡

PRAYER.

O Holy Virgin, conceived without sin, whose life agreed so admirably with thy original holiness, accept the homage of our veneration, and admit us, we beseech thee, into the number of those who look up to thee as their Mother, and are devoted to thy service. We would honor thee by proclaiming thy glorious privileges, but still more, O most Blessed Mother, by earnestly endeavoring to imitate thy virtues! Obtain for us, from thy divine Son, the grace to conform our lives to thine; to walk steadfastly after thee in the path of piety, purity, and justice, so that, after enjoying in this life the graces so abundantly bestowed upon thee, we may also share with thee in heaven that everlasting happiness which is the recompense of thy merits.

See *Résumés*, page 412.

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* Office of the Feast. † Judith xv. 10. ‡ Cant. i. 3.

3. — THE MYSTERY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

The Most High hath sanctified His own tabernacle.— Ps. xlv. 5.

CONSIDERATION.

THE Immaculate Conception of Mary, agreeing so completely with her admirable holiness, and with the most excellent dignity of Mother of God, has been, in all ages, professed and taught in the Catholic Church. Her faithful children, from the earliest times, have cherished this belief, because it would have been wholly irreconcilable with their sentiments of piety and faith not only to admit, but even to suppose that God the Father could suffer His well-beloved daughter to be sullied with any stain of sin; that God the Son could expose, even for an instant, to the power of Satan, the ever-Blessed Virgin who was to be His Mother; that God the Holy Ghost could have created otherwise than in perfect holiness and purity her who was to be His Spouse; that the Queen of Angels should not have an origin more glorious than the angels themselves; that the new Eve should not, in the fulness of time, have entered upon the glorious mission for which she was preordained and chosen, adorned with a greater abundance of celestial graces than the first Eve, who, miserably obeying the serpent, fell from original innocence.

Hence, in all ages, have the fathers of the Church and all the faithful of Christ, professed, illustrated, and cherished the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, proclaiming that " the Virgin should shine with such resplendent holiness that, except the holiness of God alone, nothing more glorious could be conceived." *

"The Catholic Church, which, ever taught by the Holy Ghost, is the pillar and the ground of truth, has never ceased to declare, to cherish, and to explain this belief as a doctrine divinely received and comprehended in the deposit of heavenly revelation; † and it has now defined it as a dogma of faith since the 8th day of December, 1854, when our holy father, Pope Pius IX., pronounced these solemn words: 'By the authority of Jesus Christ our Lord, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and our own, we declare, pronounce, and define, that the doctrine which holds that the Blessed Virgin Mary, at the first instant of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace of the Almighty God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of mankind, was preserved immaculate from all stain of original sin, has been revealed by God; and, therefore, should firmly and constantly be believed by all the faithful.'" ‡

To this solemn definition the heart of the entire Catholic world responded, "I believe!" while it thrilled with that ineffable joy, with which our supreme Pontiff was affected, when he said: "Our mouth is filled with joy, and our tongue with exultation; and we return, and shall ever return, the most humble and the greatest thanks to Jesus Christ our Lord, because, through his singular beneficence, He has granted to us, though unworthy, to offer and decree this honor, glory, and praise to His most Holy Mother." §

And is not every pious soul filled with ineffable joy in the presence of this sublime mystery? Let us consider that the Immaculate Conception of Mary is the dedication of the Temple of which that of Solomon was but the figure; the fulfilment of those words of the royal prophet: "The

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* St. Anselm. † Bull promulgating the dogma. ‡ Ibid.

§ Ibid.

Most High hath sanctified his own tabernacle;" the rising of the Star of Jacob, which is to illuminate the world, point out the way of salvation, and put an end to the dark night of ignorance and crime which covered the earth; the appearance of the rainbow that signifies the reconciliation of God to man; that it is, in fine, the Glory with which God Himself has surrounded her, who, from the august throne of Mother of God, has also become the Mother of all who love her adorable Son.

The Immaculate Conception of Mary is a death-blow to the dominion of Satan, to whose malignant power the sin of Adam and Eve had subjected the whole human family, and whose ignominious seal is stamped on every living soul, on its entrance into life. A daughter of Adam is conceived over whom he has no power; from whom he is held back by an irresistible force, and who is without stain, all holy, more pure than he was himself before his fall. Ah! he has a presentiment that in the person of one so highly privileged, it is humanity that is beginning to withdraw itself from the tyranny of his power. His pride is confounded. He not only sees the easy victory, which he achieved over the first woman, vanish before his eyes, but he begins to realize the fulfilment of the prediction, "I will put enmities between thee and the woman. . . . She shall crush thy head." *

"The waters of the river of Original Sin," says St. Francis de Sales, "ceased to run in the presence of Mary, the Ark of the New Covenant, as did those of the Jordan before the Holy Ark. God mercifully preserved her from every kind of bondage, and conferred on her the extraordinary privilege of two states of human nature, in order that she might possess the innocence which the first Adam had lost, and might also enjoy, in a pre-eminent degree, the wonderful redemption purchased by the second, by virtue

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* Gen. iii. 15.

of which the Son of God, with a beneficence of tenderness and love towards the Virgin, preordained to be His Mother, lavished upon her such an abundance of heavenly graces, and preserved her, not only free from sin, but from all danger of sin, and from every obstacle to the exercise of holy love."

The Immaculate Conception is a mystery of the love of God towards Mary. Yes, from the first instant of her conception, God loved her with a love of predilection far surpassing all other love towards any creature. He loved her as the greatest work of His hands: the only object of His full complacency; the image most nearly resembling Himself; and He most abundantly lavished upon her His favors and His graces. And Mary has most faithfully corresponded to these superabundant favors by which God has so pre-eminently distinguished her. Her heart is, from the beginning, and forever, a holy altar from which a pure, ever-increasing flame of love ascends to the throne of the Most High. Hence, the Church applies to her those words of the Psalmist: "The foundations thereof are in the holy mountains," thus teaching us that, from her very entrance into life, the Most Blessed Virgin surpassed, in perfection, the greatest Saints, and had already glorified God in a manner far exceeding that of all other creatures.

APPLICATION.

In meditating on the Immaculate Conception of Mary, let us make an act of Faith in this glorious mystery, and, with hearts filled with gratitude and love, thank the Most Adorable Trinity for having mercifully accomplished it. Let us rejoice with our good Mother in the extraordinary prerogatives with which she was favored. Let us felicitate her on her never having been under the power of the malignant serpent, and that it was preordained, from all eternity, that, in her sacred person, was to commence the work of our redemption from sin.

Let us renew our confidence in her protection, and have recourse to her in all our necessities. "Let all the children of the Catholic Church," says Pius IX., "animated every day by a more ardent piety, veneration and love, continue to honor, invoke, and pray to the Most Blessed Mary, Mother of God, conceived without original sin. Let them fly, with entire confidence, to this most sweet Mother of mercy and grace, in all dangers, difficulties, doubts, and fears. For nothing is to be feared, and nothing is to be despaired of under her guidance, under her auspices, under her favor, under her protection, who, bearing towards us a mother's love, and taking up the work of our salvation, is solicitous for the whole human race, and, appointed by God Queen of Heaven and earth, and exalted above all the choirs of Angels, and above all the Saints, standing at the right hand of the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, intercedes most powerfully, and obtains what she asks, and cannot fail."

Finally, let us remember that the Immaculate Conception is a mystery of purity and holiness, and that to honor it properly, and prove ourselves worthy the protection of the Virgin, conceived without sin, we must fly from sin, and from every occasion of sin. We must excite in our hearts the most absolute horror of everything that can displease God, and cherish the most ardent and constant desire to lead holy lives, to advance from virtue to virtue, in imitation of our Blessed Mother, until we attain that degree of perfection to which our Sovereign Lord has called us.

PRAYER.

How I rejoice with you, O Mary, and with the whole Court of Heaven, that, from the very first moment of your conception, you were pure, without spot or blemish, and filled with every grace; and with what transports of gratitude, O tender Mother, I bless the most August Trinity for the singular privileges vouchsafed to you.

O amiable Virgin, deign to accept my congratulations and my homage, and hear the prayer which I address to you this day. Obtain for me, your child, through your powerful intercession, that I may participate in those heavenly treasures which so fully abound in you; so that, after leading a life of sanctity and justice here below, I may be admitted into the company of the blessed in Heaven to praise the Lord for all He has done for you in accomplishing the work of our Eternal Salvation. Amen.

See *Résumés*, page 413.

4.—NATIVITY OF THE MOST HOLY VIRGIN.

I bring you good tidings of great joy.—LUKE ii. 10.

CONSIDERATION.

"MEN," says St. Liguori, "are accustomed to celebrate the birth of their children with feasts and rejoicings. This is a mistake. They should rather weep over them, and receive them in mourning and sadness, remembering that they come into the world not only without any merit, but children of wrath, under the burden of sin, and destined to undergo all the afflictions of life, as well as the irrevocable penalty of death. Different from this, however, was the birth of Mary, who, conceived without sin, was the especial child of benediction." Daughter of Adam, she was, in a still greater degree, daughter of God. In her, through the privilege of her Immaculate Conception, grace went before nature, and in coming into the world she shone before the angelic hosts all resplendent with holiness and beauty. Angels hovered around her cradle, and paid her their homage while celebrating her greatness. With what transports of joy did they not sing: "Who is she that comes forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon,"* "and whose foundations are in the holy mountains?"† She is the Virgin promised to earth, and who will become the glory of the heavens.

The birth of Mary must have been a source of inexpressible consolation to the souls of the just, under the old law, who were awaiting in Limbo the advent of their Redeemer, the promised Messiah. They beheld in it the dawn of the day of their deliverance. Already did Heaven seem to open its gates to their aspirations and prayers, and they gave glory to her whom the Church so appropriately styles "Gate of Heaven."

The birth of Mary is an ever-flowing fountain of joy to the earth. Oh! if there be great rejoicings in every country in the world at the birth of a Prince who is destined to govern its people, how ineffable should be the joy of men at the birth of her who, full of grace, is destined to give to the world a Saviour who is to reign in Heaven as well as on earth, and who is to be the source from which all divine mercies shall flow!

"Let the whole universe rejoice," exclaimed St. Peter Damian, "for an infant is born who is to be the Queen of the World, Gate of Heaven, Tabernacle of God, the Star of the Sea, the heavenly Ladder, by which the Lord of heaven and earth shall vouchsafe to descend among men, who, groaning under the curse of Adam's disobedience, shall not only be restored, but raised above their original state.

Besides, who can measure the inestimable benefits which the birth of Mary confers upon man? We can now, in one sense, render to the Most High God a worthy homage, because, henceforth, humanity claims, as a part of itself, a creature whom God loves; in whom He is well pleased; who is the reflection of His own perfection, the mirror of His holiness, and upon whom He looks with tender complacency — a creature who, on her part, loves, adores, and blesses Him; glorifies Him for herself, and in the name of all men, whose sister she is by nature, and whose Mother she will become by grace.

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* Cant vi. 9. † Psalms lxxxvi. 1.

We are informed in the Gospel that, at the birth of St. John the Baptist, people said to each other, "What an one, think ye, shall this child be?"* Ah! if the same question had been asked at the birth of Mary, who would have been so bold as to have risen to the exalted grandeur of the dignity that awaited this august Virgin? Who would have dared to say: She will be honored as the Queen of Heaven and earth; the Everlasting will be her Son; all nations will call her blessed, and all generations will cherish and preserve her memory? Kings will esteem it a glorious title to be called her servants, and regard her protection as their most invincible support. The earth will be filled with temples dedicated to her honor; standing between God and humanity, all celestial graces, through her, will flow to man; throughout the world and to the end of time she will be praised, exalted, and invoked. And yet had any one answered thus, he would still have fallen far below the realities of her exalted destiny.

Finally, the birth of Mary is a subject of great joy to the earth, because it announces the advent of the Messiah. It is the rising of the Morning Star heralding the appearance of the Sun of Justice, which is to enlighten and sanctify the world, plunged, during four thousand years, in the darkness and shadows of death. "The nativity of the Virgin," says St. Ildephonsus, "is, so to speak, the commencement of that of the Saviour." "Your birth, O Virgin Mother of God," sings the holy Church,* "announced to the world the happiness which is coming upon it, for from you will come forth the Sun of Justice, Jesus Christ our Lord, who, delivering us from the curse, will bring us benediction, and who, triumphing over death, will open to us the gates of eternal life."

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* Luke i. 66.

Everything, then, fills our souls with peace and consolation, and we are ready to say, writes St. Peter Damian, "Let us deliver ourselves up to gladness, and let our whole being exult with joy in the Lord; for the birth of the Mother of our Redeemer is the origin of all our solemn feasts; and as we are accustomed to rejoice in the Nativity of Christ, let us also celebrate with joy the birth of His divine Mother."

APPLICATION.

Let us praise and thank God for the birth of the Holy Virgin; let us adore Him with all the fervor of our hearts for having given to the earth her whom St. John Damascene calls "the glory of priests, the hope of Christians, the flower of virgins, the fairest ornament of the human race."

Let us devoutly honor her in her birth, in unison with the celestial choirs who hovered around her cradle; let us prostrate ourselves before the infant Virgin, and salute her as our Queen, our Protectress, our Deliverer, our good Mother, appearing among men to comfort and offer them the means of salvation.

Let us consecrate ourselves to her glory. Let us give ourselves up entirely to her, and renounce our own self-love at the foot of her cradle. Let us apply to ourselves, as our rule of life, the words of St. Francis de Sales to the daughters of the Visitation: "I invite my dear sisters to offer, upon the cradle of the Most Blessed Virgin, resolutions to serve her forever: lilies of purity, roses of ardent charity, and violets of the holiest humility."

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* Antiphon of the Magnificat of second vespers of N. of the M. B. V.

Let us enter into the views of Providence, which, while leaving us ignorant of the circumstances connected with the birth of the Most Blessed Virgin, desires that we should be thoroughly persuaded that in virtue alone consists all true greatness. Having chosen for Himself a Mother, God could so have ordered that she should be born amidst all the splendor of royalty and opulence. But such was not His design. He desired rather to distinguish her by the superabundance of the spiritual riches which He lavished upon her, in order that we might thence learn that His grace is the only riches worthy the ambition of a true Christian.

In meditating on the birth of Mary, let us recall to mind our own spiritual birth at the baptismal font; and let us give thanks to God for that incomparable grace, which, while it made us His children by adoption, and brothers of Jesus Christ, also ranked us among the children of Mary! Let us remember the promises which were then made in our name, and which we have, ourselves, repeatedly ratified and renewed; and let us see if they have been faithfully fulfilled. Let us correct everything in our conduct that is contrary to those holy engagements; and let us be assured that it is thus we can best honor the birth of Mary, that this is the bouquet we should present to her before all others. Let us remember, also, that Mary was born for Jesus, and will exist only for Him. Like her, let us think, feel, live, and act only for Jesus; and thus we shall merit to be ranked among her children here on earth, and to unite with the angels and saints in celebrating her greatness in Heaven.

PRAYER.

O Mary, whose happy birth filled Heaven with joy and earth with consolation, be always our comfort in time that you may be our joy in Eternity! Obtain for us, by your powerful intercession, the grace carefully to improve the blessings of our spiritual birth; that we may keep alive and foster daily more and more that charity which is the life of the soul, and that our conduct may be such as becomes the children of God. We ask this in the name of St. Joachim and St. Anne, your happy parents, whose intercession we implore, and to whom you will refuse nothing.

See *Résumés*, page 413.

5.—PRESENTATION OF THE MOST BLESSED VIRGIN.

Hearken, oh daughter, and see, and incline thy ear; and forget thy people and thy father's house.—Ps. xliv. 11.

CONSIDERATION.

FROM the very first dawning of reason, Mary was entirely devoted to God, as the Church teaches us in applying to her these words: "Rejoice with me, all ye who love the Lord, for, when I was little I pleased the Most High." * As she advanced in years, so, also, she increased in wisdom and in grace before God and men. She was the joy and the honor of her parents, with whom she would, doubtless, have desired to have remained, had such been the will of God.

But that Sovereign Master had other designs in her regard. He wished that she should prepare herself, by a life of retirement and prayer, for the ministry of grace that she was to fulfil; that, as the period that was to put an end to the figurative religion was fast approaching, there should be, in the Temple, a daughter of Juda, who, adorned with all the virtues of the Just of the old law, would worship Him in a manner pleasing in His sight; that the glory of that sacred edifice should be exalted by the presence of the Ark of the New Covenant, so as to be less unworthy of the Sovereign who was soon to enter it. He desired, also, that Mary should be the first to raise the standard of Virginity, and thus open the way to so many privileged souls whom He destined to be spouses of the Divine Lamb.

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* Office of the Feasts of the B. V.

Speaking to her inmost soul, He said: "Hearken, O daughter, and see and incline thy ear; and forget thy people and thy father's house, and the King shall greatly desire thy beauty." *

Mary understands that it is the will of God that she should live in retirement, and that the Temple is "the place He has chosen for her." "You call me, O Lord: behold I am ready, I will come into thy house. . . . How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth and fainteth for the Courts of the Lord. . . . Thy altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God." †

O model of correspondence with divine grace! O faithful Virgin, that you were only more generally imitated! How many souls hear the whispering voice: "Flee from the world," yet close their ears to this invitation of divine mercy, refuse to enter upon the path which leads to eternal salvation.

Mary does not deliberate. The foolish reasonings of the world, that might have tended to turn her aside from her purpose, arise not in her mind, nor could they, besides, have any influence over her will. She asks her parents to take her to Jerusalem, that she might there dedicate herself to the service of the Lord. Joachim and Anne loved their daughter with the most tender affection, "yet they did not hesitate," says St. Gregory of Nyssa, "to accede to her wishes." Oh! what must, then, have been the joy of that most holy child, while she sung with David: I rejoiced at

* Ps. xliv. 11, 12. † Ps. v. 8: lxxxiii. 2–4.

the things that were said to me: "We shall go into the house of the Lord."*

Everything is now prepared for the journey, and the blessed family set out in the direction of the holy city. A heavenly joy illumines the child who is about to present herself at the altar to be consecrated a perpetual victim to the honor of the Most High. "Angels," says St. Gregory of Nicomedia, "serve as her escort;" they cover with their wings the young plant of the root of Jesse, destined to grow in the holy place, as the Olive Branch of peace which Heaven offers to the earth: as a mark of honor, they accompany the New Ark of the Covenant to the Temple of which it is to form the brightest ornament.

O Joachim! O Anne! how acceptable to the Lord is the sacrifice you offer Him. Ah! if the pious Anne, mother of Samuel, rendered herself so pleasing to God by devoting to His service her son, that child of grace and wonder, how infinitely more pleasing must you have been in consecrating to Him that daughter who was the greatest work of divine grace, and through whom He was about to work the most wonderful prodigies of His goodness and power.

But the moment of the oblation has arrived. The door of the Sanctuary is opened, and the Priest awaits the pure and spotless victim he is about to offer to the Lord. "Then," says St. Liguori, "the sweet child, turning towards her father and mother, kisses their hands, asks their blessing, and, without a moment's hesitation, crosses the steps of the Temple."

Oh! what must have been the sentiments that penetrated the Virgin heart of Mary at the moment of this sacrifice, so repugnant to nature, so sweet to grace! Who can form any adequate conception of the pure, holy and heroic consecration she made of herself to God? How worthy a prelude it was to that consecration which the Incarnate Word was soon to make, in the same temple, through her maternal hands.

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* Ps. cxxi. 1.

Mary gives herself to God, for God alone. With her there is no self-interest, no personal object, no human motive. She yields her soul wholly to the impulse of grace, and seeks only to please the beloved of her heart. "She regards the Temple," says St. Liguori, "as an ark of peace, where she can the better hear the voice of the Holy Ghost and love and honor the Lord."

Mary gives herself to God resolutely and courageously. She does not consider that she is yet but a feeble child, and that she still requires the affectionate care of her parents. God calls her; that is enough; she knows only how to obey His voice.

It is the more general opinion of the Fathers that, on entering the Temple, Mary made a vow of chastity. On this subject, St. Bernard exclaims: "How gifted with the virtue of fortitude was she, who, trampling under foot the pomps of the world, and disdaining the pleasures of the flesh, resolved to live for God alone in the state of virginity!" She gives herself up wholly to God, without reserve, and forever, so that, as revealed to St. Bridget, the human intellect is incapable of measuring the extent of the sacrifice.

What a model is here presented to men, and particularly to those who have consecrated themselves to God, by embracing a religious life! Not only does Mary observe the precepts of the old law, but in the life she has chosen she anticipates the counsels of the new. By her consecration and vow of chastity, she inaugurates the religious life, and invites all who have the vocation, to follow her in that path in which, by Divine grace, they will overcome all the weaknesses of the flesh, and imitate on earth the Angels in Heaven. She thus gives their fulfilment to the words of David: "After her shall virgins be brought to the King; her neighbors shall be brought to thee. They shall be brought with gladness and rejoicing; they shall be brought into the temple of the King."*

APPLICATION.

In embracing our holy vocation, we are following in the footsteps of Mary; but have we embraced it with Mary's dispositions? Has our consecration to God proceeded from pure and holy motives? Has it been prompt, courageous, and entire? If it has not been so, let us prostrate ourselves in all contrition before God, supplicate His Divine grace, and renew, at this very moment, our firm resolution henceforth to be His and to live in His service. Like Mary, let us appreciate the advantages of retirement from the world; of a life of prayer in the holy avocations to which we have been called. Let us bless God every day for the choice He has vouchsafed to make of us, and let us prove our gratitude to Him by devoting ourselves to everything that can promote His honor and glory. Let us disengage our souls from every earthly affection, so as to render ourselves pleasing to the Sovereign King, who will not accept a divided heart. For Him let us subdue all pride, self-gratification, sensuality, and concupiscence. Aided by the protection, and encouraged by the example of Mary, let us advance from virtue to virtue, and thus merit, when our pilgrimage here shall have ended, to be presented by her to the Lord in the Temple of Eternal Glory.

PRAYER.

O Mary, faithful Virgin, whose only desire was to do the will of God, vouchsafe to remember me at the throne of Omnipotent Mercy, and obtain for me the grace to imitate thy virtues! Like you, O tender Mother, I consecrate myself to His service from the sole desire of pleasing Him. Oh grant that, by your intercession, my consecration to God may be sincere, entire, irrevocable; and that, ever

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* Ps. xliv. 15, 16.

keeping in mind that I am wholly devoted to God, I may be found worthy to experience in heaven the effects of His infinite mercy.

See *Résumés*, page 414.

6. — MARY IN THE TEMPLE.

For better is one day in thy courts above thousands. — Ps. lxxxiii. 11.

CONSIDERATION.

LET us consider the life of Mary in the Temple, where, in the language of the holy fathers, she appears like a most fruitful olive planted by the Holy Ghost; or like a flower which God Himself cultivates, glistening and shining with sparkling splendor, and giving forth the most delicious perfume; or as a delightful garden which the Creator vouchsafes to beautify with His own hands, to make it a fit abode for the new Adam; or a sacred tabernacle which the Divine King, who is to dwell therein, adorns with gold and precious stones.

Appreciating the favor which God has bestowed on her in calling her into His sanctuary, she praises Him with all the fervor of a grateful heart. With what ardor of soul does she exclaim, in the words of the Royal Prophet: "How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! . . . For better is one day in thy courts above thousands. I have chosen to be an abject in the house of my God rather than to dwell in the tabernacle of sinners." * She applies herself wholly to fulfil the sacred obligations she assumed in consecrating herself to the service of the Lord. Perfect model of piety, modesty, industry, humility, and self-denial, she edifies all who have the happiness to see her;

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* Ps. lxxxiii. 2–11.

her very presence seems to sanctify everything around her, and to excite in the hearts of all the most lively sentiments of virtue.

St. Jerome describes her as dividing her time between prayer and manual labor, and, continuing his eulogy, says: "She was most exact in the observance of the law; the most humble, the most perfect in every virtue. Every word she uttered was impressed with so much sweetness that it breathed the spirit of God with which she was animated. Among other graces, she most earnestly begged of the Lord that she might observe all His commandments, and that she might be permitted to see, in this world, the Mother of the promised Redeemer, and enjoy the happiness of praising, honoring, and serving her.

"What," exclaims St. Ambrose, "might I not say of the virtues of Mary? She was a virgin not only in her body, but in her affections; and the whole conduct of her life was but a sincere expression of her sentiments. Humble in heart, grave in her conversation, prudent in her plans, she spoke but seldom, and placed her confidence not in perishable riches, but in the prayer of the humble heart, which always reaches the ear of God. Always employed in the performance of duty, and reserved in her discourse, she sought not the esteem of men, but the approval of God. Careful to offend none, kind to all, and treating the aged with the utmost deference, she fled from every vain pursuit and cultivated virtue alone. There was nothing in her actions, her demeanor, or even in the tone of her voice, to reprove, so that her whole exterior was the reflection of her soul, and, as it were, the casket of her virtue; her walk, as her speech, inspired respect. What shall I say of the great variety of her occupations, and of the frugality of her repasts? Of the former, not a moment of relaxation; of the latter, every day I might say was to her a fast-day."

"As Mary advanced in years," says St. Bonaventure, "she grew much more in grace and in merit. She observed, with the most scrupulous exactness, all that the High Priest enjoined, and each day besought God that she might increase in the spirit of obedience." "She was so submissive," adds St. Francis de Sales, "that, without manifesting the slightest preference of one duty to another, she resigned herself wholly to the will of her superiors, and was so gently obedient that she enraptured all who beheld her."

By her holy prayers Mary sanctified her manual labors. Conscious of the presence of God, she united herself to Him by an indissoluble bond of love. "Her life," says the Pere de Grenada, "was such, and her sanctity of soul so great, that whoever was holy enough to comprehend it thoroughly would have learned more, from the contemplation of this Blessed Virgin, of the goodness, the wisdom and the power of God, who had so highly endowed her, than from the study of creation, and of all the grandeur of the universe."

"Her great delight," says the Pere Le Jeune, "was to read and meditate on the Holy Scriptures, and particularly the prophecies that related to the coming of the Messiah. How her heart yearned to be but the servant of her through whom He was to be given to the world! How she loved to pour forth her soul in the presence of the Lord, to prostrate herself before Him in His Holy Temple, and to cover with kisses, and water with her tears, the glorious vestibule through which was to pass the Holy of Holies. With what fervor did she pray for the coming of the Messiah, the redemption of the world, the conversion of the Gentiles, the extinction of idolatry! What mortifications did she not impose on herself! The sacrifices to God consisted of lambs, doves, or other animals, but, by her rigorous austerities, Mary offered the sacrifice of her virginal flesh."

With what sentiments did she assist at the holy ceremonies! How often, in the fulness of her charity and devotion, was she inspired to exclaim: Why am I not, O Lord, one of the victims of holocaust that are offered to you, and are wholly consumed on thy altars! Can we suppose that, illumined by light from on high, she did not discern in the Jewish sacrifices at which she assisted the great sacrifice of which these were but the figure; that she did not see in the victims that were slain on the altar the victim that was to be immolated outside of the holy city, and which alone could reconcile God with man? How constantly did she glorify God! What a subject of admiration did she afford, even to the Angels themselves! What sweet incense, arising from the altar of her heart, inflamed, as it was, with the love of God, ascended to Heaven, whose choicest benedictions she drew down on the earth, while she was, at the same time, hastening the coming of the author of all benediction!

O privileged Temple! O holy altars, before which the young virgin was so often seen raising her innocent hands in prayer, and pouring forth her soul in the presence of the living God, what acts of holy devotion have you not witnessed! And how many such acts were concealed from every human eye, that passed only through that soul of extraordinary virtue, of which the prophet spoke, saying: "All the glory of the King's daughter is within, in golden borders, clothed round with varieties." *

APPLICATION.

St. Ambrose, after having portrayed the virtues of Mary, thus speaks to Christians: "Shape all your actions after this model, and imitate the example of her whose happiness you hope to share. Yes, imitate Mary, and, to all who do so, to all who shall erect, in their hearts, an altar from which shall arise the holy incense of devotion and prayer,

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* Ps. xliv. 14, 15.

I can give an assurance of admission to those heavenly altars where they shall behold Jesus and Mary, face to face, throughout all eternity." Let us consider these words as addressed to us, and let us endeavor to live in our Communities as Mary lived in the Temple.

Let us, in our inmost heart, cherish our holy vocation, and suffer no day to pass without thanking God again and again for having bestowed on us so inestimable a grace. Let us strive thoroughly to understand the duties He requires of us, and faithfully and diligently perform them.

Let us observe all the rules of our holy state with the same dispositions of the will that distinguished Mary in the observance of all the rules of the Temple, seeing in them only the expressions of the will of God, and omitting not even the minutest details.

Let us be fervent in all our exercises of piety, and neglect nothing that may conduce to increase their fruits in our souls. Let us ardently, and in the spirit of faith, apply ourselves to all the duties of holy obedience. In union with Mary, and under her protection, let us devote every day to retirement, prayer and labor, aiming only at perfection in our holy state, and striving to render ourselves more and more pleasing to Him who has called us into His service, and who is Himself to be our recompense.

PRAYER.

O Mary, my most holy Mother, and most powerful Protectress, I bless thee for having obtained for me, through thy intercession, the grace of a religious vocation. Continue, I beseech thee, to assist me, so that, imitating, in my holy state, thy example in the Temple, I may edify all, contribute to the glory of God, make myself pleasing in His sight, and finally be admitted into the Temple of the heavenly Jerusalem to join thee in praising His holy name.

See *Résumés*, page 414.

7.—THE ESPOUSALS OF MARY AND JOSEPH.

Mary, His mother, was espoused to Joseph.—ST. MATT. i. 18.

CONSIDERATION.

THE Most Holy Virgin would have desired to spend her life in the Temple, serving God, and satisfying every aspiration of her soul, but the designs of Providence ordained otherwise. According to the most general opinion, when she had reached her fifteenth year, the High Priest, with the approval of her parents, who were still living, signified to her that she must quit that life of retirement and prayer, so dear to her heart, and take, as a husband, Joseph, the most virtuous of the members of her own family.

But why, O most high God, must she, who glorifies thy holy name with an increasing homage of adoration, thanksgiving and prayer, quit her blissful solitude? She who appears in Thy sight rapt in an interior recollection more profound than that of the Cherubim who surround Thy throne! Ah! thy revelations answer us! It is that Thy merciful designs towards fallen humanity may be fully accomplished.

These espousals were necessary to conceal from men and devils, until the time should come to make it manifest, the prodigy of the Son of God becoming Incarnate, and of the Virgin Mary bringing forth a Saviour; and as, heretofore, the Lord had ordained that a veil of purple should be spread before the Holy of Holies, that the ark and the propitiatory should not be exposed to the eyes of the profane, so, now, He wishes the marriage of Mary and Joseph should serve as a veil to the mystery of the Incarnate Word, and of the virginity of His divine Mother.

These espousals were necessary in order that Mary should have a protector, a witness of her virtue, a companion and support in her journeyings, and also that the God-Infant should have a guardian, a foster-father, whom men would regard as a real father, and who would cherish for Him, in the most consummate degree, sentiments of affection, devotion, and tenderness.

They were further necessary, that the Jews might be convinced by the genealogy of Joseph, a near relation of Mary, that Jesus was truly the Son of David, as the Messiah must be, according to the testimony of the Holy Scriptures.

God also wished these espousals to honor Joseph, and reward him for his virtues, by bestowing on him the glorious title of Spouse of the Mother of God, and reputed father of the Saviour. He wished it to exhibit to all those who live in the world, as well as to all the faithful, a perfect model of that union which should subsist among them; to form that holy family in which harmony, peace, union, mutual affection, love, and devotion should dwell, and on the model of which all Christian families should be formed. It was also to afford us a figure of that wonderful, all holy, all pure, and, at the same time, so fruitful union which He was soon to contract with His Church.

Without doubt, Mary knew nothing of these designs of God; but she was no less disposed, on that account, to yield implicit obedience to His divine will. Accustomed to see, in the persons of her superiors, God only, and, as the doctors of the church tell us, informed of Joseph's vow of chastity, she accepted, as her spouse, that just man, adorned with every virtue; elected, chosen, prepared by the Holy Ghost for the sublime mission which he was to fulfil; endowed with attributes which fitted him to rank with the most holy; pure as the Seraphim, bright in innocence as a star in the heavens, enriched with numberless graces, and every way worthy to be the spouse of the Virgin Mother of God.

"O holy union," exclaims St. Epiphanius, "in human estimation, they are ordinary espousals; but, in the eyes of angels, it is one virginity united to another."

Mary soon discovers the interior dispositions of Joseph, and Joseph perceives the greatness of Mary. Their tastes and their inclinations springing from the same principle, there was, necessarily, so perfect a congeniality between them, that it was impossible they should not embrace, in concert, the practice of the most exalted virtues. They thus, as St. Thomas says, mutually renewed their vow of chastity.

Yes! it was a holy and angelic union. It was light blending with light, in order to produce the most brilliant splendor; it was perfume mingling with perfume, to ascend to heaven in odors of concentrated sweetness.

It was an alliance founded on the love of God, for both Mary and Joseph were actuated by motives of the supernatural order. No promptings of personal interest, no motives of self-love in those two hearts which unite only because such is the will of God.

Most precious in the eyes of the Lord are those espousals of two persons most acceptable in His sight. In Mary and Joseph He sees but one heart and one soul which loves Him with the most perfect love, and which is the object of His predilection and complacency. Mary is the Queen of Angels; of those blessed spirits that are the ornament of Heaven, and whom she excels in justice. Joseph is worthy of her, and merits also an exalted rank among the Cherubim and Seraphim. In their holy union they will continue to increase in sanctity, and in the most perfect manner give constant praise and glory to God.

These espousals experienced many trials, in order that the supernatural virtues of Mary and Joseph might be rendered more manifest; but they were also blessed above all others by the birth of the God-Infant, the true Son of the Virgin Mary, and the foster Son of the holy Joseph.

To Joseph, indeed, they were glorious espousals; "for," says St. Leonard, of Port Maurice, "human language cannot express the grandeur of the height to which that just man was raised, when he received for a spouse her who came into the world as the morning star, and who brought to him the rich dowry of every virtue, which she increased more and more every day."

Ah! who will fail, with such thoughts as these, to felicitate our holy patron, and say to him, with one of his most devoted servants: "O Joseph! O faithful witness of the promises of the Father! when the Divine Word had vouchsafed to choose you as the spouse of His most holy Mother, He raised you to a degree of eminence that fills with transports of admiration the blessed spirits themselves." *

APPLICATION.

In unison with the Church, let us bless God for the espousals of Mary and Joseph, and exalt His holy Providence that with such fatherly care watches over those who faithfully serve Him. Like Mary, let us confide entirely in His parental goodness, and committing to His infinite love all our trials and crosses, let us desire only to know and execute His Divine will; let us increase and strengthen our devotion to Mary and Joseph, never separating their holy names in our homage and supplications, glorifying them as our most generous friends and most powerful protectors. Like them, let us be united in the bonds of the most perfect charity; let us love each other cordially, and for the sake of God, and testify this love by our sweetness, amiability, regard, and assistance towards our brethren. Let us cast

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* M. de Priézac.

far from us everything that might disturb our holy peace; all that indifference and coldness of manner that indicates a falling off of fraternal love. Let holy charity regulate our intercourse and sanctify all our relations with each other.

Let us love each other as brothers and as servants of the God of love, members of Jesus Christ, and members also of the same Society. To preserve this fraternal union, let us be ever ready to renounce our personal gratifications, repress our desires, subdue, in a word, the spirit of self, whenever we find that it is not conformable to the spirit of the Community.

We must ever bear in mind that our Communities should be an image of Heaven; of that abode of happiness and peace which shall ever be our glorious inheritance, if we spend our lives in the practice of true charity.

PRAYER.

We prostrate ourselves at your sacred feet, O Mary and Joseph, our holy Patrons and Protectors, and earnestly implore the assistance of your intercession. Vouchsafe to pray for us, and to ask of God, in our behalf, that our Communities may be a faithful image of the house of Nazareth, where together you so faithfully serve the Lord; that they may be established, and continue to live in peace, concord, and charity; that they may serve God with fidelity and Christian love; and that all who enter into our holy Brotherhood may zealously labor for their eternal salvation. Amen.

See *Résumés*, page 415.

8. — MARY AT NAZARETH.

They shall go from virtue to virtue; the God of gods shall be seen in Sion.—Ps. lxxxiii. 8.

CONSIDERATION.

OBLIGED to quit the Temple and pass her life in the world, Mary always preserved in her soul the seclusion, the inward recollection, the devotion of the Temple. Her immaculate heart was the sanctuary in which she offered to God sweet sacrifice; the altar on which should burn, until the Divine Word descending from Heaven should make it His throne and His abode, the perfumes of prayer and of holy aspirations.*

Let us contemplate the humble Virgin in the house of Nazareth, in which she passes her days in work and prayer, and which the angels of Heaven already honor, as a sanctuary more august in the eyes of the Lord than was the Temple of Solomon. Ah! who will ever know the holy scenes witnessed by those blessed walls which the Lord, by a most wonderful miracle, designed to make an object of veneration to the people of the West? How many acts of heroic, unobserved virtues were practiced by Mary and Joseph together that can never be known to man, sublimely accomplishing, in their persons, those words of David: "They shall go from virtue to virtue; the God of gods shall be seen in Sion."

She who was soon to be saluted "full of grace" appears adorned with all the splendor of a holiness every day becoming more exalted. Morning Star, she rises higher and higher in the horizon; dawn of the Sun of Justice, she becomes brighter and brighter in the reflection of His divine light until He Himself shall appear, to illuminate and sanctify the earth. In such forms of expression, the holy Doctors of the Church delighted to speak of the most holy Virgin. "You are," they exclaim, "the torch of the Church, the tabernacle of the Holy Ghost, the furnace of divine love." * "The perfume of your virtues surpasses all the perfumes of Mount Lebanon." † "Hail, O inexhaustible fountain of sweetness." ‡ "Garden of the most beautiful flowers, orchard well-fenced, meadow of delight. He alone who created you, knoweth the perfection of His work." §

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* M. D. Bouix.

"Mary," exclaimed St. Bernard, "is the greatest work of all the ages; incomparable among all the daughters of Juda, in the wonderful combination of shining virtues with which she was adorned. In her were pre-eminently displayed the discretion of prudence, the reserve of humility, the magnanimity of faith, the voluntary sacrifice of the heart." "Never," says St. Ambrose, "did any one better fulfil all the duties of courtesy and meekness; never was exhibited so much modesty and devotion; her whole life was but a faithful mirror of every virtue."

In her are realized the words of Solomon in reference to the "valiant woman" whom he portrays in the Book of Proverbs. Ah! of whom else could it be said, "She hath girded her loins with strength, and hath strengthened her arm. . . . She hath opened her hand to the needy, and stretched out her hands to the poor. . . . She hath opened her mouth to wisdom, and the law of clemency is on her tongue." ¶

Mary seldom appeared in public, and held but little conversation with men. Charity and the duties of her state of life could alone induce her to leave her retirement. Hon-

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* St. Methodius. † St. Andrew of Crete. ‡ St. Epiphanius.

§ St. Bernardine. ¶ Prov. xxxi. 17 to 26 oring the image of God in her neighbor, she was kind and charitable to every one. Not only was she free from everything harsh or ungenerous, but she was the very personification of goodness and meekness, and eagerly embraced every opportunity of doing good to others.

We cannot doubt that both Mary and her holy spouse had many obstacles to encounter in the obstinacy and injustice of the world, perhaps in the ingratitude of those she had helped, as well as in the sufferings and trials which are inseparable from a condition of poverty; but she bore all with a degree of patience, self-denial, strength of soul, and exalted heroism surpassing all that is recorded of Jacob, Joseph, David, Job, Tobias, and others, when struggling with adversity and trials.

Beholding in him whom Providence had given to her as a protector, the representative of God, and the depository of His authority, she honored, loved, and respected him; she experienced a joy in serving him, anticipating his wishes, and providing for his wants with the tenderest solicitude.

Ah! what a spectacle does she present to our eyes! — she of whom it has been said, "To find anything greater, we must go to the very Author of nature himself." * She who was the well-beloved daughter of the Father, preordained, chosen, and prepared to be the Mother of the Son, and the spouse of the Holy Ghost; she who is the Queen of heaven and earth, and before whom the heavenly hosts prostrate themselves in profound veneration, devotes herself to the cares of an humble household, prepares the frugal meal of a poor carpenter, provides for his personal wants, and becomes his most humble servant. What an example! Who can contemplate her thus employed, and still listen to the whisperings of self-love, or yield to the propensities that beset our nature!

On his part, Joseph manifests the most indulgent solici-

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* St. Peter Damian.

tude, kindness, and devotion towards Mary, who evinces, on every occasion, the deepest gratitude.

O sublime society of these terrestrial Seraphim! What communications must have passed between their souls, whose every sentiment proceeded from the Holy Ghost, and whose affections were centred in Heaven! What prayers arose from these two hearts, which were as one sacred altar, on which the same fire of divine love was ever burning! What blessings did not their prayers bring down upon the earth, as precursors of the great Author of every blessing whom they were to draw thither.

Being thoroughly familiar with the prophets, the Blessed Virgin knew that the time had arrived when the Messiah should appear, and confiding implicitly in the Divine promises, she already contemplated the work of Redemption accomplished, and saw the gates of Heaven thrown open to the unhappy children of Adam. Nevertheless, she prayed that the Lord would hasten those days of grace that were to shine upon the world, and she repeated the aspirations and prayers of the patriarchs and prophets, who sighed for the coming of the Redeemer. How often did she exclaim, "Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the Just; let the earth be opened, and bud forth a Saviour!" * never for a moment suspecting that she was herself that heaven, that cloud, that earth, that was to give to man Him who alone could raise humanity from its fallen state, and restore it to its original destiny.

Such was Mary at Nazareth! What a model the Holy Ghost presents to us in her person, rendered by His grace the most perfect of all creatures.

APPLICATION.

Let us endeavor to exhibit in our conduct those traits which we admire in Mary. What can be more worthy the

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* Isaiah xlv. 8.

ambition of those who call themselves the servants of that glorious Virgin.

Actuated by motives of faith, let us diligently discharge all our duties towards our neighbor, always proving ourselves just, kind, and courteous to every one. Let us strive to unite to a life of devotedness and zeal, a life of retreat, of retirement from the world, and of union with God. Let us be animated with sentiments of charity and love towards our brethren, and testify it by avoiding everything that might cause them pain, and by our solicitude to be serviceable to them, so that our Society may be an image of that which Mary and Joseph formed at Nazareth.

Let us be respectful and submissive to our Superiors, as Mary was to Joseph. Let us ever keep in mind that to us they are the representatives of God, the instruments of His Providence, and the depositories of His authority.

Let us serve the Lord as He requires of us in our vocation and employment; let us study His Divine will, and make ours conformable to it. Let us walk by the light of faith in the path of Christian and religious virtues; for it is the only road that leads to peace, the only means by which we can hereafter share in the heavenly blessings with which God has rewarded the fidelity of Mary.

PRAYER.

O most holy Mary, grandest work of Omnipotence! I dare not contemplate your perfections, for, alas! they only show me how far I am from resembling you! Yet it is my duty to imitate you. God requires it of me, and He vouchsafes me the grace to do so. I will endeavor to walk in your footsteps. Oh deign, I beseech you, to obtain for me, by your intercession, the necessary strength to approach every day nearer and nearer to the imitation of your virtues — so that I may be admitted to share with you in the joys of everlasting life. Amen.

See *Résumés*, page 415.

9. — THE ANNUNCIATION.

Hail, full of grace. — ST. LUKE i. 28.

CONSIDERATION.

FOUR thousand years had elapsed since the fall of our first parents, and the promise of a Redeemer. The time had at length come when the desires of all the just were to be accomplished, the aspirations of the patriarchs gratified, and the words of the prophets fulfilled. Figures were about to cease, and the New Covenant to take the place of the Old.

An archangel, charged with the greatest, the most sublime, the most admirable mission that ever came from God, descends upon the earth to reveal the decrees of the Most High to her through whom they were to be accomplished.

But what privileged spot is he to visit? Must it be one of the capitals of the earth, a splendid palace, or a mansion of wealth? No; he will enter an humble cottage in the small village of Nazareth; it is with the humble spouse of a mechanic that he will treat, in the name of Heaven, on the greatest interests of humanity.

At that moment Mary was engaged in prayer, pouring forth her soul in the presence of God, and supplicating Him to send Him who was to save the world. Oh! how little did she suspect that she was to have so great a part in that mystery of grace! Such was her humility that she only desired to honor and serve the Blessed Virgin who, according to the prophet, was to bring forth Emmanuel.* But He, who exalts those who humble themselves for love of Him, looked upon her with complacency, and esteemed her worthy of that incomparable privilege to which she had never dared to aspire. To her the angel is sent to ask her co-operation in the work of salvation which is about to be accomplished.

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* See Isaias, vii. 14.

Oh! to what an exaltation of glory she is raised by this alone! "God having resolved, from all eternity, to give Jesus Christ to the world through her instrumentality, He desired that she should be not merely a channel, but the voluntary instrument of such a grace; that she should co-operate in this great work not only by her holy dispositions, but by an act of her will." * "The mystery of the Incarnation of the Word," says St. Irenæus, "will not be accomplished, unless she consents, because God willed that, after the Divine Redeemer, she should be the source of every good in the order of grace." "As it involved," remarks St. Thomas, "a union between the Son of God and humanity, it is Mary who, in the name and on behalf of humanity, is called on to give her consent."

"O God, how marvellous was your regard for Mary, when it was your divine pleasure that a work so great, the object of longing expectation among men, should be submitted to her consideration! O incredible majesty of the Holy Virgin! The Ambassador from Heaven discloses to her the designs of his Master, and it is she who is to decide upon the alternative of our deliverance, or of our eternal bondage." †

"Hail, full of grace," said Gabriel to her, "the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women." ‡ What words! Are there any to compare with them? He who pronounces them is a Prince of the Heavenly host, the representative of the Most High; she before whom he bows is a poor daughter of Juda, despised by the world, and living in obscurity and toil. Ah! it is because she is more

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* Bossuet. † Los Rios. ‡ St. Luke i. 28.

exalted in the eyes of God than she is humbled in the eyes of men; it is because she is full of grace, and worthy to be the Mother of the Author of grace; it is, to borrow the thought of Saint Leon, because she has already received in her heart Him whom she is about to conceive in her womb. "The humble Virgin," says St. Ambrose, "is astonished to hear herself addressed in words of benediction so marvellous, and of which no similar instance is recorded in the history of the world." She is much troubled, and ponders on this unusual salutation. The angel, then, re-assures her and fully reveals the designs of Him whose ambassador He was. "Fear not, Mary," says he, "for thou hast found grace with God. Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God shall give to Him the throne of David His father; and He shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever, and of His Kingdom there shall be no end." *

Yet, Mary cannot understand how so great a mystery can be accomplished, and especially is she unable to reconcile it with the vow she had made to God. "She prefers," says St. Gregory of Nyssa, "Virginity even to divine maternity itself." But the angel assures her that she shall be at once Virgin and Mother. "The Holy Ghost," says he, "shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." †

"O most blessed Virgin," exclaim St. Augustine and St. Bernard, at this passage of Scripture, "the whole world, lying under the bondage of sin, asks deliverance at thy hands. Delay not, but hasten thy answer to the Messenger of God, and give him thy consent. On thy lips hang the comfort of the wretched, the redemption of captives, and

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* St. Luke i. 30–33. † Luke i. 35.

the salvation of the world." The Angel has fully reassured Mary, who, desiring only the accomplishment of the will of God, answers: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done unto me according to thy word." *

Immediately the Son of God was made flesh in the womb of the Most Blessed Virgin, and from that moment, the most solemn since the beginning of the world, men, penetrated with sentiments of gratitude and joy, can exclaim: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." † From that moment all generations have saluted Mary with the august and transcendent title of Mother of God; have offered her the homage of their veneration, and in various forms of speech have applied to her the words of Saint Augustin: "O most blessed Virgin! what thanks can we offer to thee for that beneficent consent by which thou hast delivered the human race? In what accents of praise can frail humanity sufficiently honor thee through whose blessed instrumentality Heaven has been opened to fallen man?"

APPLICATION.

In considering the Mystery of the Incarnation, let us be filled with admiration and penetrated with sentiments of gratitude at the thought that "God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son . . . . that the world may be saved by Him." ‡

Let us adore the Son of God, who is now our brother, "taking the form of a servant." § and becoming one of us. Let us measure, if we can, the depths of humility to which He has come down for love of us, and then ask ourselves, if we should not love Him in return, and with what kind of love.

Let us honor Mary in her character of Mother of God, by which, says St. Thomas, "she is so much elevated above all other creatures that she approaches the Divinity." Let nothing be more agreeable to us than to praise and

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* Luke i. 38. † St. John i. 14. ‡ St. John iii. 16, 17. § Philip. ii. 7.

magnify her, and to excite similar sentiments in the hearts of those with whom we are brought in contact. With the Angel Gabriel, let us salute her full of grace, and congratulate her on being found worthy, by her virtues, of the honor to which the Lord has raised her.

Let us admire the dispositions of faith, humility, purity, piety, and love with which she conceived in her chaste womb the Son of God, through her become the Son of man; and let us endeavor to excite in our hearts like dispositions, especially when we are preparing for holy Communion. Participating in the happiness of Mary, it is meet that we should also participate in the virtues by which that happiness was merited.

Let us impress this deeply on our hearts, and from this moment let us belong to God, wholly to God. Grace does for every one of us what the Lord did for the most holy Virgin in the mystery on which we meditate. It solicits, it awaits our consent, and it is, as Suarez teaches, "by the concurrence of the spiritual operation and the act of our own free will that Christ is conceived in our soul."

PRAYER.

O most holy Virgin, I prostrate myself before you to salute you with the Angel, and to rejoice with you on the choice which the Divine Word has made of you to be His Mother. Oh, with what joy my soul is filled on beholding you raised to the dignity which is at once the fulfilment of the merciful decree of the Most High, and the reward of your merits. Be then blessed, O holy Mother of God! and, remembering the claims which you have upon the Heart of your Son, obtain for me the grace to imitate your virtues, to make worthy communions, and to unite myself more and more closely to Jesus, until He admits me to an eternal union with Him in the mansions of glory.

See *Résumés*, page 416.

10. — THE VISITATION.

Mary went into the hill country with haste. — ST. LUKE i. 39.

CONSIDERATION.

MARY, having been informed by the Angel Gabriel of the favor that Heaven had accorded to her cousin St. Elizabeth of becoming a mother in her old age, went with haste to pay her a visit. Ah! why this eagerness? What motives could have actuated this young Virgin in her desire thus eagerly to undergo a long and difficult journey, for which, in human judgment, there was no necessity?

It is, because she feels herself impelled by an impulse of the Incarnate God whom she carries in her womb, and who, receiving from her natural life, imparts to her, in return, in an almost infinite degree, His own divine life. It is because, living in her, the Divine Saviour desires, through her, to manifest His presence in the world, and to exhibit the first fruits of His works. "Possessing God," says St. Ambrose, "whither could she direct her steps but to that which was most perfect; and why should she delay in doing the good which Providence had pointed out to her?"

Our Divine Lord wished this journey chiefly, to present to us His Blessed Mother in the exercises of charity; to show us that He has made her the depositary and dispensatrix of grace; to sanctify through her His Precursor, and endow him with the proper dispositions for the ministry he was to fulfil. He wished it to glorify her and cause to be repeated by human lips the homage that had been paid her by the Angel Gabriel; to afford her the occasion of expressing the sentiments that penetrated her soul, and to magnify the power and goodness of the Lord, the Author of all good, and to whom every blessing should be referred.

Let us contemplate the Blessed Virgin crossing the mountains of Judea, under the escort of angels, and bearing within her, unknown to all the world, Him whom all the world should adore; Him who is "all grace of the way and of the truth . . . all hope of life and of virtue;" * the true light that was to enlighten the world, and dissipate the darkness of ignorance and error.

She arrives at the end of her journey, and, anticipating the friendly greeting of her cousin, first salutes her, thus giving us, as St. Francis de Sales remarks, an example of her profound and deep humility. As soon as Elizabeth heard her voice, her child, cleansed from original sin, from the bondage of Satan, suddenly became the holiest of the children of men, and, leaping with joy in his mother's womb, thus announced the presence of Him whom he was afterward to present to the people in the words: "Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who taketh away the sins of the world." † And this miracle is wrought at the voice of Mary, in order that we may learn, as the Doctors of the Church ‡ teach, that her divine Son has appointed her mediatrix between Him and us; His co-operatrix in the work of our spiritual birth, and the channel through which we are to receive the fruits of our redemption.

But at the same moment that John the Baptist is sanctified, Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Ghost, who reveals to her the Incarnation of the Word, and the virginal maternity of Mary. Seized with a holy transport, she gives expression to her hopefulness and joy, while she celebrates the greatness of Mary, saying in a loud voice, "Blessed art

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* Eccle. xxiv. 25. † St. John i. 29. ‡ St. Bernard. St. Bonaventure. St. Liguori.

thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? Blessed art thou that hast believed, because these things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord."*

And had she not abundant cause for this enthusiasm of joy? By the rays of divine light, she at once discovers that the Messiah has come into the world; that Mary is His mother; that, even before His birth, He works fruits of salvation, and that these fruits are produced in her own child!

The eulogy of Elizabeth begins with the closing words addressed to Mary by the Angel Gabriel: "Blessed art thou among women."† It is because she speaks by the same spirit; because she unites in that concert of praise which, commenced by the ambassador of Heaven, shall continue through all ages, and, with the other words she utters, and those the Church has deemed appropriate, shall ever be on the lips of all faithful Christians.

As the representative of the human race, she adores the Son of God, made Man for our salvation, and she adores Him with Mary and through Mary, to whom she says, "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb;" He of whom thou art the mother is the forerunner and fulness of every blessing. He is the Messiah, so long desired and expected, by whom shall be cancelled the curse pronounced at the beginning of the world, and in whom all men shall receive happiness and peace.

At the thought of the divine Maternity, of the singular honor with which the Lord has favored her cousin, St. Elizabeth humbles herself most profoundly in the presence of the Blessed Virgin, declares herself unworthy of her visit, while it fills her soul with the most unspeakable delight. She then congratulates her, more, however, on the exalted virtues which merited the favors that God had lavished upon her than on her personal dignity. "Blessed art thou," she exclaims, "that hast believed,* for thy faith has merited that thou shouldst see those things accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord," and that thou shouldst coöperate in the work of the world's redemption.

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* St. Luke i. 42, 45. † St. Luke i. 28.

Meditating on this interview, the Father de Grenada exclaims, "what emotions must Mary have experienced while listening to these words which made known the wonders wrought in her! What must have been her sentiments of joy, gratitude and love! No, we cannot penetrate these mysteries; let us be satisfied with admiring them."

"The two mothers," remarks a learned and pious author,† "exhibit a picture appealing, in an eminent degree, to our faith and piety. How their demeanor rises to the dignity of their situation! What sentiments! what words! what humility! what majesty! Not a word of self, of vanity, or of superfluity; all there is grand, holy, heavenly, divine.

"Far from exulting in the singular favors bestowed on them, they do not even speak of them. From the Holy Ghost alone they receive the knowledge of what God has done for them, and they speak only that they may show which can be the more humble. One declares, that she is unworthy of receiving a visit from the Mother of God; the other, exalted as she is in dignity, seeks only the advantage of being the more humble, and if she cannot, consistently with the consciousness of her divine maternity, reject the praises of which she is the object, she refers them all to God as tributes of gratitude and justice."

APPLICATION.

Let us unite with St. Elizabeth and the universal Church in glorifying Mary. Let us celebrate her wonderful greatness. Let us extol her for those virtues which merited for her that incomparable dignity which has exalted her even above the Seraphim and Cherubim.

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* St. Luke i. 45. † M. A. Nicolas.

Let us honor the holy family which she visits, and on which, through her, so many heavenly favors have been lavished. Let us congratulate it on possessing in its midst that Blessed Virgin who is the Ark of the Covenant of the New Law, and who carries in her person grace and salvation.

Let us renew our confidence in Mary, who is to us what she was to the family of Zacharias, the channel through which we shall receive the favors of Heaven, and who delights in communicating them most abundantly to us. Let us have recourse to her in all our wants, and supplicate her to be our mediatrix with her divine Son. Let us especially strive to merit her protection, and, to that end, let us always endeavor to imitate her virtues.

Like her, let us be obedient to the inspirations from on high; and, animated with charity and zeal, let us promptly and courageously accomplish all the good that God requires of us. And in the visits which it is occasionally our duty to make, let us, like Mary, be courteous, sincere, and, above all, edifying in word and deed, as the sanctity of our holy state requires.

PRAYER.

O holy Virgin, mother of my Saviour! O Queen of mercy, who was so eager to visit and sanctify the family of Zacharias, vouchsafe, I beseech you, to visit my poor soul, and deliver it from the power of Satan and the slavery of sin. Be with me during my life, that I may faithfully discharge all my duties as a Religious and as an instructor. Especially visit me at the hour of my death, so that, under your powerful protection, your divine Son, in the fulness of His mercy, may admit me into the company of the blessed, to praise you forever in the mansions of eternity.

See *Résumés*, page 416.

11.—MARY GLORIFYING GOD.

My soul doth magnify the Lord.—St. Luke i. 46.

CONSIDERATION.

AS Mary possessed, in a greater degree than any other creature, the grace of God, so she rendered Him, in a more excellent manner than any other, a worthy tribute of gratitude. When, therefore, Elizabeth congratulates her on her greatness and virtues, she answers by praising God and expressing, in a sublime canticle, the sentiments of love, gratitude, humility, and confidence that fill her heart.

David has said, "My tongue is to the Holy Ghost but the pen of a scrivener that writeth swiftly." * With how much more reason could the Blessed Virgin employ this language when filled with the Holy Ghost. She surrenders her soul to the transports He awakens; and, when united with the Incarnate Word, she contemplates, by the divine light that illumines her soul, the wonders He has done for her and for all mankind.

"My soul doth magnify the Lord." All in me,—understanding, will, memory, emotions, desires,—everything in me, proclaims the power, wisdom, and goodness of God, the source of every blessing, and to whom every blessing should be referred. I bless Him, with all the ardor of my soul, for the wonders He has wrought in me, by which He makes known to men His great love for them, and the mercy He desires to exercise in their regard.

Such are the first words that issue from the lips of Mary;—words which are soon to be re-echoed by the choir of

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* Ps. lxiv 2.

angels around the crib of Bethlehem, as they sing "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will."*

O holy Virgin, you glorify God more perfectly than all other creatures; you possess, in its greatest fulness, the peace which is the inheritance of men of good will, while you exclaim, "My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."

Why should not Mary be filled with gladness? She carries in her virginal womb Him who is the hope of the children of Adam; the consolation of the just who died in the Lord; the supreme happiness of the angels; Him who, applying to her, in advance and in superabundance, His infinite merits, distinguished her above all creatures, preserved her pure from every stain, confirmed her in every heavenly grace, and raised her to the dignity of Mother of God. If David danced with joy in the presence of the holy ark, how incomparably greater must be the joy of Mary, who possesses the Most High Himself, confirming, through her, to the whole human race, the covenant of which the ark was but the prophetic symbol.

And this joy, so just and well founded, is likewise profound, deep, and universal; penetrating the soul, the heart, the flesh of the Blessed Virgin, and manifesting itself in her gesture, her looks, her accents, in every manner in which the emotions that overwhelmed her soul could be revealed. But it is not for herself alone that Mary thus glorifies God and manifests her ineffable happiness: Mother of men, she is their representative; and it is, therefore, through her, that the countless hosts, who shall profit by the Redemption, the company of the elect, shall praise the Lord in the excess of their unspeakable happiness, beginning on earth the hymn of praise and thanksgiving which is to be echoed around the throne of God.

Mary rejoices in the Lord, "because he hath regarded the humility of his handmaid." She humbles herself before Him to the depths of annihilation, and it is because she considers herself as nothing in His eyes, that He looks upon her with complacency, and deems her worthy of the greatness to which she was preordained. He, who lifteth up "the poor out of the dung-hill that He may place him with princes, with the princes of His people," * wishes to reward her incomparable humility by favors that elevate her far above even the angelic hosts, and that will claim for her upon earth a tribute of honor and praise far more transcendent than all the honor and praise that ever can be given to mortals.

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* St. Luke ii. 14.

"From henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." Already had Elizabeth given her this title when felicitating her on her faith. By her prophetic spirit, Mary sees the nations of all ages animated with similar devotion; congratulating her on her greatness, honoring her for her high prerogative, and, through her, praising Him who so abundantly enriched her. "He that is mighty," she exclaims, "hath done great things to me, and holy is his name!"

Yes, these are, indeed, great things which the Lord hath done for Mary, manifesting, in a most wonderful manner, the Almighty power of their Author. Let us consider that He preordained her to be the first of all creatures; that He preserved her free from the stains of original sin; that He lavished upon her His favors in the greatest abundance; that He adorned her with a degree of holiness to which no other human being could approach. Above all, let us remember that He raised her to the dignity of Mother of God, and that she is, in truth, a Virgin Mother and Mother of God the Saviour. Let us also keep in mind that she has been appointed Mother of the faithful, the mediatrix between her Son and us, and that through her "His mercy is from generation to generation to them that fear Him."

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* Ps. cxii. 7-8.

The family of Zacharias, — of that priest who feared the Lord, — experiences through Mary the effects of Divine mercy, and so will it be to all the true servants of God. Mary will visit them, and her visit will prove a most abundant source of the most precious blessings.

The most holy Virgin, contemplating the future which the Holy Ghost unveils before her eyes, and beholding it, as it were, in a single picture, proclaims the works of goodness and mercy which the Lord will accomplish, and which appear to her as already accomplished. "He hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble. He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich he hath sent away empty. He hath received Israel His servant, being mindful of His mercy." But, because God, while He is merciful, is also just, she also glorifies Him by proclaiming the works of His justice. "He hath shown might in His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart."

She does not, however, restrict herself to the impression produced by the sentiment of God's justice exercised upon the world. Queen of Mercy, she exalts, above everything, the mercy which the Lord forgetteth not, "as He spoke to our Fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever."

Such is the canticle of Mary, considered in one of its aspects. What elevated sentiments! What profound and exalted views! What heavenly thoughts! What sublimity! How admirable the occasion it offers to us to contemplate anew the favors which Heaven vouchsafed to this Virgin ever-blessed; to render thanks to Him who gave them; to rejoice in them, remembering that they are the portion of our good Mother; and with all the ardor of our souls to pay the homage of respect, love and veneration to her whom all generations shall call Blessed, and to whom the choirs of Angels and Saints shall decree that title in the mansions of everlasting glory.

APPLICATION.

Let us do more than admire the canticle of Mary; let us endeavor to excite in our hearts those sentiments of faith, of adoration, of gratitude, of humility and confidence with which this divine Mother was penetrated. Let our souls, like hers, glorify the Lord, and in Him place all our affections. Let us call to mind the favors He has bestowed upon us, and make them an occasion of thankfulness and joy.

In imitation of Mary, and with the help of her protection, let us labor to acquire humility; let us always humble ourselves, profoundly, before God and before men, for it is then the Lord will look down upon us, in our lowliness, and give us a share in the riches of His grace. Let us be truly zealous to make Him known, loved, and praised, and to raise up for Him faithful worshippers, so that, having glorified Him in the days of our exile on earth, He may admit us to glorify Him with Mary in our true home in Heaven.

PRAYER.

O holy Virgin, well-beloved of the Sovereign King, who has worthily celebrated His greatness and His mercy, vouchsafe to intercede with Him for us, and obtain for us the grace whereby we may be enabled to imitate your virtues, particularly your humility; grant, through your protection, that we may so imitate you in glorifying Him, in this life, that He may admit us, when our pilgrimage is over, to unite with you in praising Him throughout the ages of eternity.

See *Résumés*, page 417.

12. — THE JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM.

Joseph and Mary went from Nazareth to Bethlehem. — See St. Luke ii. 4, 5.

CONSIDERATION.

HAVING returned from the house of Zacharias to her humble dwelling in Nazareth, Mary passes her days in silence, prayer, and work, awaiting the moment of grace when she will give a Saviour to mankind. The Word, now become Incarnate, imparts to her His divine life, and thus returns her a hundredfold for what He receives from her. He operates in her heart, where He dwells as in a paradise of delights, seated on a throne of grace in the midst of a burning furnace of divine love. "In her," says St. Ephraim, "have been accomplished all the predictions of the just, and of the prophets, for it was from her that that Star was to arise whose divine splendor shall illumine the path of all who walk in darkness."

The day draws nigh when the Messiah is to appear in His humanity before the eyes of men, whose only hope of redemption is through Him. At this time, an edict went forth ordaining that a census should be taken of all the subjects of the Roman Empire, in the execution of which the Jews were directed to have their names enrolled in their respective cities. Joseph and Mary, being of the family of David, were obliged to go to Bethlehem, the city of David. They receive this order as coming from God, the source of all authority,* and admire the wisdom of His Providence, which brings all things to the execution of His designs, and makes the census ordered by Augustus serve the purpose of fulfilling the prophecy of Micheas: "and thou, Bethlehem Ephrata, art a little one among the thousands of Juda: out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel." * Whatever difficulties the journey to Bethlehem may present, their only concern is to accomplish it as speedily as possible.

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* See Rom. xiii. 6.

Let us contemplate them journeying towards Judea. The distance is great; they are poor; the season is inclement; what have they not to suffer? But nothing can, for a moment, disturb the peace, the courage, the patience, the resignation of their souls. Perfect imitators of God who is coming into this world to toil and to suffer, they not only accept their trials without a murmur, but they regard them as favors, and from hearts submissive and fervent they offer up to Heaven only hymns of thanksgiving and praise.

In this journey to Bethlehem, Mary reminds us of Jesus who is coming to us, and already suffers for us. He begins the work of our redemption, which for Him, and for all those whom He calls to accomplish it with Him, and through Him, is essentially a laborious work. His most blessed Mother comprehends this, and she does not, therefore, fail to excite in herself sentiments conformable to those of that adorable Victim.

With holy resignation, Mary and Joseph also practice piety, modesty, interior recollection and union with God. Who can sufficiently admire the interior dispositions of those terrestrial Seraphim, more inflamed with divine love than the celestial Seraphim who compose their heavenly escort! With what fervor they adore God who is with them, and who will soon be with all! How great is their holiness and the sublimity of their discourse, whose subject is the great mysteries which are being wrought, and of which they are the ministers!

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* Micheus v. 2.

"How beautiful upon the mountains," exclaimed the Prophet, "are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, and that preacheth peace." * "How much more beautiful are yours, O Holy Virgin, who brings us not only good tidings of salvation but the Saviour Himself — Him, who alone can pacify all things, and shall take the title of "Prince of Peace." † O blessed woman, we lovingly kiss the traces of thy footsteps, while begging thee to remember us with thy Divine Son, so that He may truly be both our peace ‡ and our salvation.

At length, Mary and Joseph arrive at Bethlehem. They enter into that city of their illustrious ancestors, where, doubtless, many of their relations and acquaintances still reside. They, therefore, hope that they will meet with hospitality, and be supplied with such necessaries as their fatigue and their destitute condition require. But, alas! they meet only with refusals; all the doors at which they knock are closed against them — "there was no room in the inn." § "O God," exclaims St. Francis de Sales, in contemplating this picture, "what contempt does the world exhibit to persons the most heavenly and holy." But these two holy souls cheerfully embrace their humiliations, and endure these refusals with unalterable sweetness. Remembering that it is written, that Christ will be despised, they glorify the Divine Providence that wills that the prophecies should at that very moment begin to be fulfilled.

Mary and Joseph at once comprehend that the fruitlessness of their efforts to procure lodgings was connected with the designs of the Most High in reference to the birth of the Messiah; that God, who is coming to redeem a world lost through pride, sensuality, and avarice, would enter it in humiliation, suffering and poverty. Again, adoring the purposes of Eternal Wisdom, they go forth

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* Isaiah lii. 7. † Ibid. ix. 6. ‡ Eph. ii. 14.

§ St. Luke xi. 7.

from Bethlehem, and wander around the suburbs seeking a spot where they might pass the night. Finally, they enter into an abandoned cave, which they will render, by their stay there, the most glorious of monuments — the most holy and venerable spot on earth.

APPLICATION.

Let us honor Mary, who shows herself so great, so perfect, in virtue. Above all, let us endeavor to imitate her as faithfully as possible. "This glorious Virgin," says St. Bernard, "is the royal way by which the Saviour came into this world; let us, then, endeavor to pursue this way, so as to ascend to Him, who, by it, came down to compassionate our miseries."

Like Mary, let us view everything with the eyes of faith, and not by our own judgment, or by human wisdom. Let us judge of things by the light of Heaven, and not by our weak, limited reason, which is so liable to be biased by self-love, cupidity, and other passions. In all our crosses, and particularly in everything that happens to us contrary to our own inclinations, let us see only the order and the will of God; and let it be our chief study to understand and to carry out His merciful design towards us. Above all, in joy or sorrow, in happiness or affliction, let us raise our thoughts and our hearts to that Sovereign Maker in adoration and praise.

Let His will be ever the rule of our conduct. We know what He requires of each one of us personally; let us perform it as becomes those who have consecrated themselves to His service and profess to belong to Him alone. Let us always behold Him in the persons of our superiors, obeying them from motives of religion, with promptness, simplicity, exactness, and affection; thus proving that we faithfully follow in the footsteps of the Blessed Virgin, who styled herself "the handmaid of the Lord." *

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* St. Luke i. 38.

Let us do good zealously, disinterestedly and generously. Let us work for the salvation of our neighbor to the best of our ability, regardless of the trouble, fatigue or annoyance we may have to encounter. In all our trials, let us say with Mary and the saints: may the will of God be done; blessed be His holy name. Let us not be disheartened at the rebuffs, slights, or insults of which we may be the objects, nor allow resentment to find a lodgment in our bosoms. Mary had only blessings in her heart for inhospitable Bethlehem; let it be so with us in regard to all who may treat us unkindly.

Let us also imitate the other virtues which we admire in Mary, particularly her modesty, her love of God, her union of heart with Jesus living in her, and who should also live in us who are His members, and receive Him so often in our holy communions.

How happy shall we be if we thus faithfully follow in the footsteps of Mary. We shall go where she has gone, and where her divine Son awaits us to give us a share in the glory with which He has rewarded her merits.

PRAYER.

How I should desire to imitate you, O Holy Virgin, temple of wisdom, mirror of justice! How I would wish to reproduce in my soul your dispositions of faith, submission to the will of God, obedience and resignation. But, alas! how far am I from resembling you! Vouchsafe, then, O good and tender mother, to pray for me, so that, by the aid of your intercession, I may resemble you more and more every day, and thus render myself worthy of the ineffable happiness which your virtues have merited.

See *Résumés*, page 417.

13.—MARY IN THE STABLE OF BETHLEHEM.

She brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him up in swaddling-clothes, and laid him in a manger.—St. Luke ii. 7.

CONSIDERATION.

MARY and Joseph not being able to find shelter in Bethlehem, repaired to a wretched cave which had been used as a stable, but which will be, henceforth, a consecrated spot infinitely more honorable than the tabernacle of Shiloh, and the temple of Solomon, for it is there He is to be given to the world in whom the law and the Prophets terminate, and of whom the temple and all symbolical religion were but the figures. The night had reached its middle course; a night dark and cold, typifying the night of ignorance, error and crime in which the human race was then plunged; but it was the long-looked-for hour in which the Sun of justice was to appear in the horizon. Mary and Joseph are engaged in prayer, offering anew to God the desires of the just who had never ceased to sigh for the coming of the Redeemer. On a sudden a celestial brightness encompasses them, and the Incarnate Word, leaving the virginal womb, like a ray of light passing through a pure crystal, presents Himself as an infant before the eyes of His divine Mother, and of His holy foster-father Joseph.

Oh, what a moment was that when the Saviour-God appeared in this world — He whom all the angels of heaven adore, and before whom Joseph, praising Him in the name of all men whom he represents, falls prostrate, and, as it were, annihilated!

But who can conceive what passes, at this happy moment, in the soul of Mary! Queen of angels and Mother of men, in the name of heaven and earth she adores the God who has made Himself her Son; and taking Him in her arms, she offers Him to the Eternal Father, and to the veneration of the angelic hosts.

O holy Virgin! O woman blessed among all women, your hands are the sacred altar on which He who is the victim of propitiation for the salvation of man, offers Himself when entering into the world. You press to your maternal bosom, you cover with kisses, you bathe with tears of love the new Isaac, the Son of promise, in whom all nations are blessed. Ah! who would not be transported with joy! "Mary," says St. Amadeus, "gazes upon the Word of life with eyes sparkling with love; she warms with her breath Him who warms and inspires all; she supports Him who supports the universe, and in her arms He reposes who is the eternal repose of the elect."

"What do I behold!" exclaims St. Gregory Thaumaturgus; "a Virgin covers with swaddling-clothes Him who clothes every creature; she lays in a manger Him who is seated above the Cherubim." "O Mary," adds St. Bernard, "rejoice, for you hold in your arms Him who is the splendor of heaven. Wrap the infant-God in poor swaddling-clothes; lay Him in a manger upon straw; those poor swaddling-clothes are our riches, and are more precious than the most costly purple; that crib is more glorious than the throne of the most powerful monarch."

"O mystery most profound, most affecting, most sublime! What language can adequately express its greatness! What heart can rise, I will not say to the infant Jesus, but to Mary, bending over the crib of the adorable Emmanuel!"* What transports of joy swell her bosom when contemplating in that humble crib — that abyss of humiliation — the Son of the Most High, the Eternal Word, the splendor and substantial likeness of the Father become, through love for us, a suffering Infant, on a bed of straw!

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* Mgr. Pavy.

Yes, everything here is ineffable, and in our utter inability to portray it we can only repeat the words of a holy Bishop:* "O Bethlehem! O stable! O crib! O Infant Jesus! O wonder of wonders, who can ever comprehend it? O Mary, what a night! what an hour for you was that in which you brought forth your God! My senses are confounded; at least, let my heart speak."

Mary and Joseph adore, love, praise, through the newborn Child, the heavenly Father, with whom the Incarnate Word is our only Mediator; it is the whole human family that, in their persons, praise God that the gates of Heaven have again been opened by Him who came from God to redeem the world. Oh, what are their transports of gratitude! In what holy accents do they thank the Eternal Father for the gift He has bestowed upon the earth, being no other than God himself. How ardently does Mary glorify and praise the Lord for having been "mindful of His mercy, and having fulfilled the promise made to Abraham and his posterity."†

Let us not, however, suppose that the joy of Mary, at the birth of our Saviour, was unmingled with sorrow. The crib was the starting-point on the road to Calvary, and the Mother of the adorable Victim of expiation was there, to a certain degree, the Mother of Sorrows. Did she not see her adorable Son destitute of everything, forsaken by men, suffering and weeping! Could it be that her heart was not sad, and that she could refrain, as St. Francis de Sales says, from mingling her holy tears with those that flowed from the blessed eyes of her divine Infant.

APPLICATION.

Let us glorify Mary as the Mother of our blessed Saviour. Let us pay to her the homage of our veneration, especially at that moment when we contemplate her holding the divine Infant in her arms, or adoring Him in the manger. Let us congratulate her in accents of the most fervent piety, exclaiming with the Church: "O wonderful intercourse! The Creator of the human race, assuming a living body, has vouchsafed to be born of the Virgin. The root of Jesse has given forth its flower; the star of Jacob has risen; Mary has given birth to the Saviour." *

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* Mgr. Pavy.

† St. Luke i. 54, 55.

Let us unite with this divine mother in adoring, praising, and supplicating the new-born Jesus. By the light of faith, let us behold God, our Saviour, in the Child given to us. Let us see in Him the Strong One, the Wonderful One, the Powerful, the Invincible, of whom the Prophets have spoken, the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth.

Let us adore Him with fervor. Let us prostrate ourselves at the foot of His crib, and there consecrate to Him our heart and body, all we have and all we are.

Let us rejoice at His birth. "A child is born to us," † and that child is the promised Messiah, is He who is the redemption and salvation of the unhappy children of Eve. He is come into this valley of tears to weep and to suffer; but it is that He may dry our tears, and change our sorrow into joy. In Him we find hope and peace. "His coming among us," says St. Anselm, "by dispelling the darkness of death and sin which hung over the world, has been the coming of great joy to all the faithful."

Let us thank Him for having descended to us in order that He might raise us to Him, and re-establish us in the privileges we had lost. Let us only think of the love He has testified for us, and then ask ourselves, how far we should love Him.

Yes, let us love Him with all the love of which our hearts are capable, and offer them up to Him as a pledge of our fidelity in doing what He requires of us, in accordance

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* Office of the Circumcision. † Isaias ix. 6.

with the instructions so admirably conveyed in the mystery we are meditating.

In coming into this world in humiliation, suffering, and poverty, He teaches us that He is come to combat the threefold concupiscence, and that those who belong to Him ought to embrace with courage the practice of humility, mortification, and detachment from creatures.

Oh, that we could only comprehend His teachings as the saints understood them! Like them, after the example of Mary and Joseph, we should aspire to but one thing — to be conformable, in this life, to that adorable Model, and thus render ourselves worthy of enjoying in the next that happiness with which He rewards those who faithfully strive to imitate Him.

PRAYER.

O Blessed Virgin, by whom the Redeemer has come to us, and you, O St. Joseph, who with your holy spouse didst first adore Him, grant that through your intercession He may receive us into His favor. Let your perfect purity, your profound humility, your abundant charity, obtain for us forgiveness for our sensuality, our pride, our indifference, and make us worthy of the mercies of the infant God. In union with you, O Mary and Joseph, let us prostrate ourselves before His crib to adore and praise Him, and to consecrate ourselves to Him. Vouchsafe to lay before Him our homage, and obtain for us a superabundant participation in the fruits of His birth, so that we may one day be admitted to contemplate and enjoy Him in the heavenly Bethlehem.

See *Résumés*, page 418.

14. — MARY AND THE SHEPHERDS OF BETHLEHEM.

And they came with haste; and they found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in a manger. — ST. LUKE ii. 16.

CONSIDERATION.

WHILE Mary and Joseph, with ineffable love, were lavishing upon the new-born Child all the care which His condition required, the Angels reveal to earth the mystery which has been accomplished. We read in the Gospel: "And there were, in the same country, shepherds watching and keeping the night-watches over their flock. And behold an angel of the Lord stood by them; and the brightness of God shone around them, and they feared with a great fear. And the angel said to them: Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy that shall be to all the people. For this day is born to you a Saviour who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. And this shall be a sign unto you: you shall find the infant wrapped in swaddling-clothes and laid in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will. And it came to pass, that after the angel departed from them into Heaven, the shepherds said one to another: Let us go over to Bethlehem, and let us see this word which has come to pass which the Lord hath showed to us. And they came with haste, and they found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger." *

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* St. Luke ii. 8–16.

They go to Jesus, and they go to Him through Mary and Joseph, who receive them, present them to the infant God, accept in His name their simple presents, unite with them in adoring and praising Him, and imploring His mercy, thus fulfilling their sublime office of mediators of men with the Divine Redeemer. But what were the sentiments which filled the soul of Mary?

"Who will describe to us," exclaims a holy Bishop,* "the flood of emotions that swell her bosom; the flux and reflux of thoughts that crowd upon her mind! How happy she is at the spectacle of this first testimony to the glory of her Son. What transports are excited in her virginal breast by the faith, the piety, the zeal of the shepherds, who thus hasten to adore the new King, whose poverty and helplessness, instead of repelling their ardor, seemed rather as the sign by which they recognized Him. On beholding the Infant wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and lying in a manger, they confessed that He was the King of Angels; and, by proclaiming to every one what they had seen and heard, they became the first Apostles of Him of whom, after the Blessed Virgin and her holy spouse, they were the first worshippers.

As regards the shepherds, she blesses divine Providence for having first called the poor and the simple to the crib of the Messiah in preference to the rich and the learned of the world, and, from her inmost heart, she repeats those words of her canticle: "He hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart . . . he hath exalted the humble, and filled the hungry with good things."† Entering perfectly into the spirit of the gospel which was soon to be announced, and which she practiced in advance, she esteems and exalts poverty, for which the new-born Jesus shows so marked a predilection, and she already utters in her soul those words which the divine Master was afterwards to proclaim: "Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." *

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* Mgr. Pavy. † St. Luke i. 51–53.

With what joy does she learn from the shepherds that the angels had appeared to them, and revealed the mystery of the birth of the Saviour, accompanied by a multitude of heavenly spirits, praising together the Lord of Hosts! How her heart thrilled with delight when they repeated to her the words they heard, and which even now were being wonderfully fulfilled: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to men of good will."

In the angels who announced the birth of the Saviour, she sees the representatives of all the heavenly hierarchies, and in the shepherds, those of the Jewish people, and, indeed, of all nations, and she thus beholds the heavens and the earth, angels and men, adoring her divine Son, and through Him offering to the Father a worthy homage of praise and thanksgiving.

With what transports does she also repeat, "Glory to God in the highest," for she knows that, through the divine Mediator, creatures offer to the Most High a tribute of supreme adoration that He cannot but accept; that the humiliations of His Word sufficiently glorify Him, and abundantly atone for the outrage which sin offers to His holy name. How ardently does she desire their entire realization when she adds the words, "And on earth peace to men of good will." Yes, may the peace which comes from God alone be the portion of all who love and cherish rectitude and justice. It is now the portion of those shepherds who were so docile to the voice of heaven; may such be the case with all men.

As the holy Evangelist remarks, Mary, penetrated with joy, pondered these words in her heart. That which she sees, and that also which she foresees, excites in her soul indescribable transports. She beholds in the future those

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* St. Luke vi. 20.

great events of which the appearance of the angels and the adoration of the shepherds were the precursors and the pledge; the call of the Apostles, the choice and appointment of those shepherds of the flock of Jesus Christ, who will spread throughout the world the glad tidings of the Saviour's birth; the efficacy of their preaching, which will lead countless multitudes to the God of Bethlehem; the propagation of the Gospel among the true children of Israel, and afterwards among the Gentiles; the Church established throughout the world; God glorified by all people and all generations; the enemy of virtue vanquished and chained; the reign of grace extending itself more and more; men of good will working out their salvation through the merits of the Redeemer, doing good on earth, and, consequently, enjoying that peace of conscience which is the most precious of treasures in this life, and, finally, constituting, in the life to come, that city where troubles, dissensions, and wars are unknown, and where He alone reigns forever of whom the Prophet spoke, saying, "A child is born to us . . . and His name shall be . . . the Prince of Peace." *

APPLICATION.

"Let us all," says St. Francis de Sales, "accompany the shepherds of Bethlehem to visit the divine Infant, and beg His most holy Mother to allow us to gaze upon Him. Let us go there, bringing to Him the presents of our piety and love, presents which Mary and Joseph will joyfully receive to lay before Him, and which He will accept with delight.

Let us prostrate ourselves in the silence of admiration and prayer before that crib, which is the cradle of the Sovereign King, born in poverty. Let us recognize and adore, under the swaddling-clothes which cover Him, the God of infinite greatness and power, and let our adoration

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* Isaias ix. 6.

accompany that of Mary and Joseph. Let us offer to Him all we have and all we are; but especially let us give Him our heart, for it is our heart He desires and asks. After the example of Mary, and under her protection, let us meditate in our hearts upon the mystery of the divine infancy, so full of instruction and comfort. Let us know how to reverence, interiorly, those humiliations of the Incarnate Word which the saints, particularly St. Bernard, St. Francis of Assisium, St. Anthony of Padua, and St. Theresa, meditated on with so much delight, and from which they derived such abundant fruit. Religious and Teachers, placed under the special patronage of the infant Jesus, let us contemplate Him on His poor bed of straw, or in the arms of His holy Mother, and consider the love He manifests for us, the virtues of which He is the model, the designs of His mercy toward us and our pupils, and let us resolve upon what we should do to acknowledge His generosity and conform to His wishes.

PRAYER.

O holy Virgin, permit me to unite with you in adoring, at His birth, my divine Saviour become your Son; for such is my unworthiness, that He could not receive the homage I might offer Him myself. Remember, then, that He has made you our Mediatrix with Him, and exercise your high privilege in my behalf. Oh tell Him that I love Him, and that I have no other desire than to love Him forever. Tell Him that I adore and praise Him, offering Him all I have and all I am. Tell Him that I ask through you, O divine Mother, the grace to persevere in these good dispositions, and thus be permitted finally to glorify Him in heaven.

See *Résumés*, page 418.

15.—MARY AT THE CIRCUMCISION OF THE CHILD JESUS.

God sent His Son . . . that He might redeem them who were unde the law.—GAL. iv. 4, 5.

CONSIDERATION.

LET us consider Mary in the mystery of the circumcision, that most rigorous and painful ceremony of the Jewish religion. Ah! she knows well that her divine Son, who is innocence and holiness itself, could not be subject to the law that compelled man to assume the outward mark of sin; but she also knows that He did not come into this world to abolish the law and the prophets, but rather to fulfil them. She understands that He is willing to submit to circumcision, that He may appear, in everything, like to the men He is come to redeem; to show Himself as a descendant of Abraham, and thus remove from the Jews all pretext for not acknowledging Him; to prove that He has become the victim of the sins of men, that He takes upon Himself the iniquities of all; that, on His entrance into the world, He already begins to expiate them, and thus gives a pledge that He will continue and complete the expiation by a life wholly devoted to suffering and toil, ending with the bloody sacrifice of which He will be both Priest and Victim. Mary, seeing clearly into His divine heart, knows that He is impatient to suffer, that He may manifest His love for us and merit our salvation, and that already He says: "I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized; and how am I straitened until it be accomplished." *

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* St. Luke xii. 50.

Having no will but that of her adorable Son, she consents that He should shed the first offerings of His sacred blood, the price of our ransom, and with it she mingles her tears. Here, as afterwards on Calvary, she suffers in her heart all the agony of her divine Son, and she suffers voluntarily, through the desire she has to be conformable to Him, and to co-operate in the work of our redemption. On seeing Him seal with His blood His merciful offer to be a victim for us, she devotes herself to be His companion in His sacrifice, so that, as He is to be called "a man of sorrows, knowing what it is to suffer," she might also be called "the Mother of Sorrows," whose heart was plunged in an ocean of grief.

Oh, how much should we admire, love, and praise her! for it was that we might be born to the life of grace that the blessed Mother of Jesus was resigned in delivering Him to the knife, and, at a later period, to the cross. Yes, it was through love for us that she desired to accompany Him on the painful journey that was before Him, beginning at the crib and ending on Calvary; "that at every tear, every drop of sweat and blood that flows from His divine body, at every blow with which He will be tortured, she desires to be at His side, to adhere steadfastly to her voluntary immolation, to submit to all its anguish, and to repeat unceasingly, until the consummation of the sacrifice, 'I am the handmaid of the Lord': be it done unto me according to His wonderful designs."* This is the ministry she accepts. The mystery of the circumcision of the Saviour is, therefore, in one sense, the mystery of the compassion of Mary.

But what are the sentiments of that divine Mother when the infant God receives the adorable name of Jesus, a name whose entire signification He alone could fulfil. From the moment of the Annunciation she had constantly pres-

*M. A. Nicolas.

ent to her mind that sacred name; she meditated on its meaning; she admired its efficiency; she enjoyed its sweetness ; she carried it engraved on her immaculate heart.

Oh, how her heart thrills with joy when that name is given to the divine Jesus! Who can conceive what were the emotions that penetrated her soul when she said to Him, Your name is Jesus! and when she mentally added, You are, O my son, that Saviour so ardently longed for, that Redeemer prefigured by Moses, Joshua, and Gideon, and whom the Prophets foretold from age to age? You are the only hope of the guilty and unhappy race of Adam! It is through you that the world will be redeemed, that men will again be placed on the path to heaven, and that those who are in darkness and in the shadow of death shall open their eyes to the light of truth.

In pronouncing that adorable name Mary experiences ineffable joy, and, at the same time, a heavy sadness; for it awakens ideas of the most opposite character, which forcibly excite both of these feelings. On the one side she beholds, as if it were accomplished, the work of man's redemption; she sees her divine Son entering into His glory, carrying with Him the spoils of hell, leading in His train, according to the expression of David, captivity captive, * opening the gates of heaven, and causing countless multitudes of the elect to enter therein, who will sing forever the praises of the triumphant Lamb.

But, on the other side, looking upon this great work even in its accomplishment, she measures the length, the breadth, and the depth of the abyss of sufferings and humiliations by which Jesus, realizing the full signification of His name, will rescue all men from the slavery of sin and from eternal damnation. By her knowledge of the prophecies she sees Jesus Christ "drink of the torrent in the way," † the object of persecution and outrage; hated,

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* Ps. lxviii. 19. † Ibid. cix. 7.

calumniated, condemned, and at last shedding, in a full torrent, that blood of which he has now shed but a few drops. Yet whatever emotions she experiences, she ceases not to bless the Heavenly Father through the divine Mediator, and to honor and extol the sacred name of Jesus, mentally repeating those words which the great Apostle was afterwards to proclaim, and which are so conformable to the spirit of the mystery of the circumcision, "He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death. . . . Wherefore God also hath exalted Him, and hath given Him a name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth." *

APPLICATION.

In union with the Most Holy Mother, let us adore the infant God, now shedding His blood for the first time, and giving us a pledge that He will shed it to the last drop on the altar of the great sacrifice. Let us consider how much our salvation has cost Jesus, our Redeemer, and Mary, our co-Redemptress, and let us strive, with all the energy of our souls, that so many labors and sufferings may not be lost upon us.

Let us unite ourselves with Jesus, the victim of expiation; let us courageously resolve to follow Him in the road of affliction and suffering through which He passed; let us die to ourselves and to our inclinations; let us mortify our minds, our hearts, and our senses, so that we may have in ourselves that spiritual circumcision of which St. Paul speaks,† and which ought to be the mark of every true Christian.

Let us piously adore the name of Jesus; let us extol it with Mary and the Church, saying, "The name of the Lord is holy and terrible,‡ nevertheless it is like an

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* Philipp. ii. 10. † Rom. ii. 29. ‡ Ps. cx. 9.

oil of perfume, and whoever shall invoke it will be saved. It is worthy of praise from the East to the West; all generations will praise it: be this holy name blessed now and forever." *

Let us invoke it with faith, confidence, and love, in all our necessities, and particularly in our temptations, our sufferings, and our sicknesses, remembering that it is to the faithful a powerful weapon against the devil, a balm that heals all the wounds of the heart, a faithful source of strength and courage; and, at the same time, let us invoke the holy name of Mary, which should never be separated from that of Jesus.

Happy are they who bear those sweet names written on their hearts, and who pronounce them with a lively and devoted piety. They experience how powerful they are, and, by the graces which they bring upon them, they become imitators of Jesus and Mary, and render themselves worthy to celebrate the excellence of those blessed names in that city where they will be repeated forever by the choirs of angels and saints.

PRAYER.

Jesus! Mary! O sacred names of my Saviour and His most holy Mother, who is also my Mother, how I love to treasure you in my heart, and how I desire to cause you to penetrate the hearts of those committed to my care! Would that I could worthily honor you, and honor you at all times! Grant that I may be able to pronounce your sweet names at the hour of my death, for they would be a passport to my soul, and open to it the gates of heaven!

Holy Virgin, grant, by your intercession, that these desires may be fulfilled. I ask this of you, in the name of the sufferings of Jesus, and of those which you yourself endured while co-operating with Him for our salvation.

See *Résumés*, page 419.

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* Office of the Holy Name of Jesus.

16.—MARY AT THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI.

They found the child with Mary His Mother.—ST. MATT. ii. 11.

CONSIDERATION.

AFTER the shepherds of Bethlehem, who represented the Jews, the Magi, representing the Gentiles, were called to adore the infant Jesus, whose birth was revealed to them by a mysterious star that appeared in the East. Obedient to the call of grace, they leave their country and their families, and perform a long and perilous journey, proclaiming, as they journeyed along, the good tidings of the coming of the Messiah.

Arriving at Jerusalem, they asked, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" Herod is troubled, and being told that the Messiah was to be born at Bethlehem, he sends the Magi thither, directing them to return by Jerusalem. They proceed on their journey, still guided by the mysterious star, and, as the Gospel expresses it, "They found the child Jesus with Mary His mother; and, falling down, they adored Him, and opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts,—gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having received an answer in sleep, that they should not return to Herod, they went back another way into their own country.*

Such is, in its most prominent features, the mystery of the adoration of the Magi. To the reflecting soul how fully do the greatness and virtues of Mary display themselves here! Does not every incident show her to us as our Guide, our Mediatrix, our Queen, our co-Redemptrix, and our Model?

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* St. Matthew ii. 11, 12.

A star has shone in the heavens, announcing to those who were buried in darkness that the Sun of Justice has arisen on the horizon of Judea, and by whose guidance the faithful Magi come to the crib of Bethlehem. Now that star is evidently a symbol of Mary, whom the Church calls the "Morning Star;" for the Immaculate Virgin appeared to the world like a star, shedding rays of beauty and announcing the approaching advent of Him who is the full splendor of heaven.

The star of the Magi guided them to the infant God; but does not Mary also lead to Jesus all those who contemplate her and follow her footsteps by the imitation of her virtues? Does not the devotion rendered to this glorious Virgin naturally lead to the worship of adoration to her divine Son? Does it not stop there, as did the star of the Magi when it "stood over where the child was"?*

Happy, then, O Mary, is the soul that is truly devoted to thee, and which proves its devotion by walking courageously in thy footsteps! It is thus that it walks forth from the darkness of ignorance, error, and sin, and must soon be enlightened by the rays of truth and inflamed with the fire of divine charity. Through you it ascends to Jesus, who is our only light, our strength, our life, and our happiness.

The dignity and mission of Mary, symbolized by the star, are, besides, wonderfully illustrated by all that is recorded concerning the mystery of the adoration of the Magi. These wise and holy strangers "found the child with Mary His Mother." In manifesting Himself to men, Jesus Christ wished to do so in company with His most holy Mother, and in calling them to acknowledge Him as their King, their Saviour, and their God, He called them also to proclaim her as their Queen, their co-Redemptrix, and the Mother of God.

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* St. Matthew ii. 9.

What glorious splendor encompasses Mary while holding on her knees or in her arms the God who is born to the Jews, and who benignantly receives, while smiling on the Magi, the whole human race that He came to save. The holy Virgin exhibits herself here in an aspect that calls forth all our admiration.

She is the root of Jesse, adorned with the flower which she has produced, and on which rests the Spirit of the Lord; she is the tree of life, offering to the human race the fruit of life; she is the royal throne of the true Solomon, who there reposes with delight, and from it abundantly lavishes His favors; she is a sacred altar on which a victim of priceless value is offered up to heaven; she is the triumphal chariot of Emmanuel, the golden candlestick on which He is placed who is the light of the world; she is a firmament without a cloud, on whose lovely azure shines the Sun of Heaven. . . .

No, nothing can convey an adequate idea of your greatness, O Divine Mother, and all who contemplate you in the light of faith must exclaim, with St. Epiphanius, "Who can worthily glorify her who, holier than the Seraphim and Cherubim, is, after God, superior to everything? Hail! O Most Happy Virgin, Spotless Dove, Heavenly Spouse, Throne of the Divinity; Hail! O full of grace! Christ the Lord is with you, and through Him you are our joy and our hope."

In the adoration of the Magi, or in that of the shepherds, Mary exhibits herself as the Mediatrix between men and God the Saviour. If those happy strangers prostrate themselves before the divine Infant and adore Him, she also adores Him with them in her heart, and their united homage becomes most acceptable in His eyes.

Whilst they pray, she prays for them and for all those they represent, supplicating her divine Lord to reward them for their piety, and to hasten the day of salvation for all nations.

"Opening then their treasures, they offer the divine Child gold, incense, and myrrh." But it is Mary who receives their gifts in the name of her Son, and who presents them to Him; and in passing them through her immaculate hands their value is increased a hundredfold.

By the nature of their presents the Magi proclaim Jesus their King, their God, and their Saviour, and in like manner they also proclaim Mary Mother of the King of kings, Mother of God, Mother of the Saviour, and they say to her, "You are blessed among women, you whom kings honor and whom princes reverence. You alone have received the blessing promised to Abraham, and you have received it that it may be transmitted through you to all nations." *

You are, O divine Mother, our hope and our happiness; for you hold in your hands even Him who is grace and mercy.

The presents of the Magi, considered in their symbolical aspect, admirably remind us of the virtues of Mary and thus concur in rendering her praise. Gold is the emblem of charity, frankincense of fervor, and myrrh of mortification. But where, after Jesus, shall we find the realities of these emblems, if not in His Most Holy Mother? What heart is consumed like Mary's with the fire of Divine love? What soul glorifies the Lord like hers, by its faith, its piety, its devotedness? Who was ever more humble, more dead to self?

It is true, then, in whatever aspect we consider her, that she appears to us supremely great, worthy of all homage, and of all veneration, occupying the first rank among all

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* St. Andrew of Crete.

human creatures, having above her God alone, who has become her child.

APPLICATION.

Let us honor Mary as our Guide and Mediatrix, and fervently embrace the practice of devotion to her. We shall thus enter perfectly into the spirit of the mystery on which we are meditating.

Let us offer ourselves to her, so that through her we may pass to Jesus. It is the rule of the pious Christian to belong all to Jesus through Mary, and all to Mary for Jesus. Let love for God the Saviour and love for His Most Holy Mother be like two flames in our hearts, which, when united, form but one.

Let all that we desire to offer to Jesus pass through the hands and the heart of Mary. Let us consecrate ourselves to her that she may consecrate us to Him.

Let us implore her help on all occasions, "For," says St. Ildefonsus, "it is to her that her Son has committed all His heavenly treasures; it is through her hands that all the graces He bestows on man are destined to pass. But let us endeavor to merit her favor by honoring her ourselves and causing her to be honored by others; above all, let us strive to imitate her virtues.

Let us zealously labor to acquire the virtues of charity, piety, and self-denial; for these are the gold, incense, and myrrh which we must offer to Jesus through Mary, and which, entitling us to the patronage of the Mother, will draw down upon us the infinite mercies of the Son in time and eternity.

PRAYER.

O Holy Virgin, my hope and my comfort, you show yourself to me holding in your arms the infant God, who is my life and my happiness, and who vouchsafes mercifully to accept my homage. I humbly beseech you to be my Mediatrix with Him, to beg Him to accept the consecration I make to Him of my mind, my heart, and my body; and grant that, through your intercession, after having offered Him on earth the gold, incense, and myrrh of the virtues He requires of me, I may be admitted to offer Him, in heaven, the crown of final perseverance.

See *Résumés*, page 419.

17.—THE PURIFICATION OF THE MOST HOLY VIRGIN.

The days of her purification, according to the law of Moses, were accomplished.—St. Luke ii. 22.

CONSIDERATION.

FORTY days after the birth of the infant God, Mary and Joseph go from Bethlehem to Jerusalem to comply with the requirements of the law. Let us contemplate them departing from the sacred cave which witnessed the birth of the Saviour, and from the city of David, which their sojourn there had made one of the principal cities, not only of the kingdom of Judah, but of the whole world.

What sentiments penetrate their hearts during that journey! They carry, by turns, the divine Infant, on whom they lavish the most tender affections, while they adore Him with all the ardor of their souls. They know what a treasure they bear; that, even at that moment, these words of the prophet Isaiah could be repeated:—"Arise, be enlightened, O Jerusalem; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." *

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* Isaias lx. 1.

Who can express the emotions that thrilled the heart of the Most Blessed Virgin on approaching and beholding the temple in which she was formerly presented to God, as her adorable Son is now about to present Himself, and in which she had passed, we may say, the whole of her youth? She returns there, and thus accomplishes what had been prefigured by the dove returning to the ark with the olive-branch (the symbol of that peace which Heaven gave to the earth), for the Immaculate Virgin carries with her Him who gives peace to the world, Him over whose cradle the angels sang, "And on earth peace to men of good will," * and whom the prophet calls the "Prince of peace." † Yes, she returns to the temple, but bearing in her arms the Messiah, that Son of promise for whose coming she had there so fervently prayed, that holy victim of whom all the victims of the Mosaic law were but prophetic symbols, that Supreme Pontiff in whose footsteps all nations might enter into the Holy of Holies, and in whom all symbolical religion ended.

She returned there, but accompanied by that Angel of the Covenant announced by the prophet,‡ and who alone was to be the greatest glory of the temple. Oh, what emotions possess her soul as she crosses the steps of the sacred edifice, entering therein as the triumphal car of divinity!

Mary enters into the temple to perform there the ceremony of legal purification, and, at the same time, to present the infant God to His heavenly Father.

She was not bound to observe the first of these ceremonies, for, as St. Bernard expresses it, she could say, "What need have I of purification? Why should I stop at the vestibule of the temple, I whose virginal womb has become the temple of the Holy Ghost Himself, and by whom has been given to the world the Lord God, who is the Master of the temple?"

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* St. Luke ii. 14. † Isaias ix. 6. ‡ Mal. iii. 1.

Does it not seem that she ought to have dispensed with this ceremony for the glory even of her Son? In confounding herself with other women did she not, in fact, confound Him with other infants, and thereby give cause for doubt as to His divine origin? "Assuredly, O Blessed Virgin," adds St. Bernard, "you had no need of purification, and that law was not made for you. But had your Son need of circumcision? Ah! be among women as one of them, since your Son has condescended to enroll Himself in the number of the children of men."

Mary did not avail herself of that which, in the eyes of God, would have exempted her from the ceremony of the law. She knew that it was required of every mother, and, without stopping to ask whether she was bound by the law, she obeyed it at the proper time and in the manner prescribed. She does not seek for immunities. Laying aside her prerogative, she humbly mingles with the crowd. Setting before her mind her duties as a daughter of Judah, she simply fulfils them, without troubling herself about her privilege of Virgin Mother or of Mother of God.

As by His circumcision her Son shows Himself a faithful observer of the most painful precept of the law, so she proves herself equally faithful in observing its most humiliating one. Besides, her desire is to be forgotten by men, and the ceremony of purification serves her as a means of concealing the wonderful gifts lavished upon her. Thus, as St. Augustine remarks, "Grace raises her above the law, but humility makes her obedient to it."

O prodigy of humility, which should fill men and angels with astonishment and admiration! Mary is purified! But, O Holy Virgin, are you not more pure than the azure of the heavens? you who, from your Immaculate Conception, have been endowed with grace more excellent than that of the Cherubim; you, whom the Holy of Holies, the

Sun of Justice, has clothed with His own brightness; you to whom the Most High has said, "Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee." * O incomparable act of humility! The Mother of the King of Glory, of Him who was begotten before the morning star, appears as any other mother of the unhappy children of Adam! What an example does it not hold up for our imitation! What a condemnation of the refinements and pride of our self-love! What more effective lesson to teach us to observe not only what is commanded but also to hearken to the counsel we may receive?

In the ceremony of purification Mary presents her offering, but it is the offering of the poor. Nor is she ashamed of it. On the contrary, her humility and her faith make her piously proud of it. Does she not know how great are the privileges which poverty procures? Does she not see that it is so highly esteemed by the Saviour that He will make it His inseparable companion?

The Most Glorious Virgin appears, then, to us in this mystery a perfect model of obedience, humility, and poverty; that is to say, of the virtues which ought, in a special manner, to characterize us, who have renounced the world for a life of self-denial and obedience.

APPLICATION.

Let us resolve to walk faithfully in the footsteps of our good Mother, and to excite in our hearts those virtues which we admire in her. What motives appeal to us to do so, whether as Christians, or, even more powerfully, as Religious. Let us then, in seriousness and at once, commence the good work.

Let us love the law of God and scrupulously observe it. Let us never forget that our holy rules are, for us, the expression of that law, and that we should ever yield them

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* Cant. iv. 7.

a willing and cheerful obedience. Let us submit to their yoke with willing hearts, for it is the yoke of Jesus Christ, which we ought to take upon ourselves, because by it, as our blessed Lord Himself assures us, we shall find rest for our souls.

Let us not importune our Superiors for dispensations, but rather guard against self-love, the love of indolent ease which so often seeks out foolish pretexts—plausible reasons for exemption from such or such an exercise, or for the omission of this or that duty. Oh, how we should here tremble at illusion! It is on this account we should always take the safest course, and that is perfect regularity and entire submission.

Let us be scrupulously obedient to our Superiors, and in this let us be actuated by motives of faith. It is God who, by their ministry, makes known to us what He requires of us; let us perform, then, every duty with simplicity, earnestness, and love.

Let us strive to acquire the practice of humility; let us always seek occasions to humble ourselves before God and men, remembering, alas, how full of misery we are and how much burthened with sin.

Let us fervently ask, through the intercession of Mary, that our souls may be purified from every stain of sin, that we may persevere in the grace of God, advance daily in virtue, and approach more and more closely to the model of our good Mother, until we finally obtain in heaven that glorious reward which God has prepared for those who, while living, conformed to that sublime model of sanctity.

PRAYER.

O Most Blessed Virgin, Mirror of Justice, faithfully exhibiting the traits of the Divine Model of the predestined, with what perfection do you practice obedience, humility, and poverty! How far, alas, am I from imitating you! Oh, vouchsafe, I beseech you, to pray for me, and obtain for me the grace to walk faithfully after you in the path of virtue. Preserve my soul free from every stain of sin; make me, through obedience, humility, and detachment from the world, more and more acceptable to your Son, until He admits me intó the Heavenly Jerusalem to unite with you in praising Him throughout eternity.

See *Résumés*, page 420.

18. — PRESENTATION OF THE CHILD JESUS.

They carried Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord. — St. LUKE ii. 22.

CONSIDERATION.

IN order to perpetuate among the Jews the remembrance of the passage of the destroying angel, who, for their deliverance, had struck with death the first-born of the Egyptians, the Lord had ordained that the first-born of the children of Israel should be offered to Him in the temple, and afterwards ransomed with a sum of money.

To comply with this ordinance, Joseph and Mary, carrying the Divine Infant, repair to Jerusalem, to which might be addressed the words which the Church employs in her office: "Prepare thyself, O Sion, and receive the Christ, the Lord. Salute Mary, who carries the King of Glory, the new light! The Virgin tarries, bearing in her arms her Son, begotten before the morning star." *

Accompanied by her virginal spouse, Mary enters into the temple. "She approaches the altar," says St. Liguori, "and there, filled with modesty, humility, and devotion, she offers her Son to the Most High."

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* Procession of the Purification.

How consoling to the pious soul, how sublime, is the aspect in which she now appears! Is she not herself a sacred altar on which is placed the Divine Victim of our redemption? Does she not perform, as it were, the duties of a priest, offering to God, in her own name, and in behalf of all men, Him through whom alone earth and heaven are again reconciled? "No," says St. Epiphanius, "I do not fear to give to Mary the name of Priest as well as that of Altar."

Let us contemplate, O Christian souls, that Most Holy Mother of the Saviour kneeling in prayer before the sacred altar, raising up toward heaven her Divine Son, who is the true victim of holocaust, of thanksgiving, of expiation, and of supplication; adoring, blessing, and imploring the Father through Him whom He has appointed the only Mediator between Him and the world. O sublime prayer, who can conceive its excellence? Who can estimate the treasures of grace which it brings down upon the earth, and which furnish to mankind so just an occasion to exclaim with David, "We have received Thy mercy, O God, in the midst of Thy temple." [*]

TORONTO

In the meantime, the ceremony of presentation is finished by the ministry of the priest designated for that purpose. The infant God is offered, or rather offers Himself, to His Father. Ah! have we not here that sacrifice of Juda and Jerusalem which was to be infinitely pleasing to the Lord? [†] Does not the Son of God, as the Victim, glorify His Heavenly Father in the most perfect manner?

He adores Him, and renders Him homage worthy of His supreme majesty and of His sovereign power. By His very humiliations He speaks the words of the royal prophet,

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[*] Ps. xlvii. 10.

[†] Mal. iii. 4.

"Great is the Lord, and exceedingly to be praised in the city of our God, in His holy mountain."* He praises Him for all the blessings of nature, of grace, and of glory which He has bestowed or shall bestow upon angels and men, and particularly for the incomparable blessings which He has lavished upon Mary, His Most Holy Mother.

He implores mercy for sinners, whose Mediator He has become, and He asks their forgiveness through the merits of that divine blood of which He has already made an offering, to be completed by the grand sacrifice of Calvary. In like manner He prays for the establishment, the preservation, and the propagation of the Church, by means of which He will remedy all the evils of humanity here below, and in the world to come build up the city of the elect.

Yes, this is what the infant God does at this moment of grace; and Mary, whose heart is so closely united to that of her adorable Son, offers Him to the Father for the same purposes that He offers Himself for, with sentiments of piety and fervor which delight the heavenly hosts.

But let us here consider the greatness and the heroism of the sacrifice which Mary makes to the Lord. Other mothers, in presenting their first-born male child as a victim, know that it is a ceremony without any consequences to the child, and that he can be effectually ransomed by the prescribed gift. But this was not the case with Mary. She knew that none of the children offered, up to that day, was the victim that God would accept; that her divine Son was the only victim of propitiation that could satisfy for the sins of the world, and that He must give His life in order that men may be saved.

In offering Him, therefore, to God she consents to the bloody sacrifice of Calvary, and, through her love for us, she subscribes in advance the sentence which was to condemn Him to death. She has before her mind the reflection that when He will be given back it will be only as a deposit, and that she must again deliver Him when the half of that great week shall arrive in which, according to Daniel,* Christ was to be sacrificed; and thus in placing Him in the hands of the priest, she placed Him, in a certain sense, on the arms of the cross. As she gave, at the moment of the annunciation, her consent to the incarnation of the Messiah, which was the subject of the angel's visit, so, on the day of the presentation, she ratified, so to speak, the treaty of the Saviour's passion of which that day was in truth a figure, and, as it were, a first preparation.†

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* Ps. xlvii. 2.

The infant God is ransomed by Joseph and Mary, but the repurchase is only figurative; He remains the victim devoted to death. "A day will come," says St. Bernard, "when it will no longer be in the temple nor in the arms of Simeon He will be offered, but outside the city and on the arms of the cross; when He will not only not be ransomed, but when He will ransom men by the effusion of His blood. That will be His evening sacrifice: this is only His morning oblation. But in both the words of the prophet will be realized: "He was offered because it was His own will." ‡

Mary, like her Son, and from the same motives, wishes both sacrifices, and in the temple, as later on Calvary, she delivers Him up to divine justice for the expiation of the sins of the world. In offering Him she also offers herself, that she may be, like Him and through Him, a victim of adoration, thanksgiving, reparation, and prayer. She unites herself with Him that she may share His labors, His sufferings, His griefs, and one day ascend with Him the altar of His bloody immolation.

O admirable Virgin, so justly called by the Fathers of the Church the restorer of the human race, how much you have loved us! You consent that for us, miserable sinners, the infant God whom you clasp in your arms, and whom you love with a tenderness incomprehensible even to the most affectionate of mothers, shall be a victim in our place, and wash with His blood the stains of our iniquities. Ah! your heart is an abyss of charity, generosity, and courage, and the most perfect image of that of your divine Son.

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* Dan. ix. 26, 27. † Bossuet. ‡ Isaias liii. 7.

APPLICATION.

Let us honor with the most profound respect, and, with sentiments of the most lively gratitude, glorify Mary presenting her divine Son to the Lord, performing, in the name of the Church, that ministry of grace, the source of so many spiritual blessings.

Let us admire her dispositions of piety, fervor, charity, and courage. Let us frequently recall them to our minds, and endeavor to excite similar dispositions in our own hearts, so that we may attain that degree of perfection to which, in our holy state, we should all aspire. In union with her, let us offer Jesus to God His Father, and let us offer ourselves with Him.

Let us, in a special manner, have this intention when we recite the offerings of the Holy Childhood, when we assist at the holy sacrifice of the mass, of which the mystery of the presentation was a figure, when we possess in our hearts, by holy communion, the same divine Infant that Mary had in her arms. Oh! then, especially let us endeavor to pray as she prayed; let us adore, love, bless, and implore the Father through the Son, whom we possess in our hearts as on an altar, and from which He asks mercy for us.

PRAYER.

O divine Mother of my Saviour, blessed be thy name for having offered to heaven for us the victim of our redemption. Unite, I beseech thee, my oblation with yours, and present to the Heavenly Father my heart, my mind, and my body, which I joyfully consecrate to His service without reserve and forever. Since you have offered the Chief, should you not also offer His devoted followers? O deign, then, to exercise in my behalf that ministry of grace now, and especially at the hour of my death; the Father will then receive me with complacency and admit me to adore and praise Him with you, in the temple of the New Jerusalem. Amen.

See *Résumés*, p. 420.

19. — MARY AND THE AGED SIMEON.

Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His Mother . . . Thy own soul a sword shall pierce. — St. Luke ii. 34, 35.

CONSIDERATION.

THE mystery of the presentation of the child Jesus is a mystery of joy, for in it humanity offers, through Him who is our only Mediator, a true worship to the Most High. It is also a mystery of sorrow, for the divine Infant, uniting with Himself His Most Blessed Mother in the sacrifice, offers His sacred Person as a victim destined to sufferings and death for the expiation of our sins.

How these two characteristics are exhibited in what the Gospel records concerning the holy old man Simeon: "And this man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Ghost was in him. And he had received an answer from the Holy Ghost that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord. And he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when His parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for Him according to the customs of the law, he also took Him into his arms, and blessed God and said: 'Now Thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word, in peace, because my eyes have seen Thy salvation which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people of Israel.' "*

The holy old man is in an ecstacy of heavenly delight; he enjoys in his inmost soul the happiness of seeing with his eyes, of touching with his hands, and pressing to his breast the Christ of the Lord, the infant God, the Saviour given to the world. Anne the prophetess, who came into the temple at the same hour, shares his happiness. She "confessed to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all that looked for the redemption of Israel." †

Ah, what were the sentiments of Mary and Joseph at that moment! They see the words of the angel accomplished: "Glory to God, . . . and on earth peace;" ‡ for God is, in truth, praised, exalted, blessed, by His own Son, and, in union with that Divine Mediator, by Simeon and Anne, who enjoy a peace the most perfect.

In those two holy persons they see all the descendants of Abraham, all the just of the Mosaic law, glorifying God for the accomplishment of the promise made to the patriarchs, and so often repeated by the prophets. They hear the infant Jesus proclaimed the Christ of the Lord, the Saviour come down from heaven, the light of nations, the glory of Israel. They are witnesses of the adoration offered to Him, and to which they unite their own. It could not be otherwise, then, than that their hearts should be overwhelmed with joy, as they desired only the glory of God and of His Son Jesus Christ, and this the holy Gospel informs us was the case, in the words "His father and mother were wondering at these things which were spoken concerning Him." §

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* St. Luke ii. 25–32. † St. Luke ii. 38. ‡ Ibid. ii. 14.

§ St. Luke ii. 33.

Yes, Holy Virgin, rejoice in adoring your Son in the arms of the happy old man who, in the excess of his joy, only asks to die. With you I behold him in his ecstacy. But suddenly a cloud darkens his brow, his eyes are moistened with tears, and he casts a look of the deepest compassion first on the Infant and then on you. After blessing you and your holy spouse, he says, while presenting to you your Son, "Behold the Child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted: and thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed." *

Ah! the peace that Simeon enjoys is the anticipated fruit of the sufferings of Him whom he holds in his arms, and which, by the light of prophecy, he clearly beholds. He sees the Saviour contradicted in a thousand different ways, during every age, in His doctrine, His morality, His Church, and in His disciples; he sees the work of redemption, by which a great number of souls is to profit, become, nevertheless, a cause of condemnation to many who, by their perversity, will refuse to receive its benefits, and, for that reason, will be more culpable in the eyes of the Sovereign Judge; he sees Mary associated with her divine Son in His sorrows, and suffering them all in her soul.

With what sadness must not the heart of the Holy Virgin have been penetrated! The words that she hears cast the darkest cloud over the future of her child, in whom is treasured all her happiness: they are a light by which she can discern distinctly, in the distance, the Cross of Calvary!

"In His mercy," says St. Liguori, "God hides from us the evils that await us in the future; He is pleased, through compassion, not to let us know the troubles that are before us, so that we may have to suffer them only once. But He does not act thus with Mary; that she may fully merit the

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* St. Luke ii. 34, 35.

title of 'Queen of Martyrs,' she had, in common with her divine Son, an anticipated knowledge of all the sorrows she was to undergo."

"Although Mary," says St. Theresa, "already knew that her Son was to lay down His life for the salvation of the world, it was, at the moment when Simeon spoke, that she saw passing in review before her the details of the tortures which were reserved for Him." The prophecy made to her already begins to be fulfilled, and the sword pierces her soul. "She sees in advance," says St. Bernard, "Him who is the strength of the saints fall down in agony, seized as a criminal, and overwhelmed with outrages."

The more Mary discovers of grace, beauty, and amiability in her adorable Son, the more poignantly does she feel the presentiment of all He has to suffer. "Oh, how much lighter would her anguish have been if she loved Him less, or if He had been less amiable!" * "From that day forth she suffered death every moment, because at each moment she recalls to her mind the sufferings and death of Jesus." †

Mary comprehends the prophecy of Simeon, but she remains silent. She is calm, superior to the emotions which overwhelm her soul. In the expectation of the sorrows which are foretold to her, she shows herself as she will be when they shall actually come, perfectly resigned to the will of God. She does more, for in her desire to testify her love for Jesus and to co-operate in our redemption, she rejoices in what she will have to suffer, thus surpassing in this kind of heroism so many of the elect, who, consumed with the fire of divine love, will esteem it their greatest consolation to have a part in the sufferings of Jesus, and will exclaim with St. Theresa, "either suffering or death," or with the blessed Margaret Mary, "Deprive me not, O Lord, of the happiness of suffering. Nothing pleases me in this world but your cross."

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* St. Liguori. † St. Bernard.

Associated with her son in His greatness, she is happy in being united with Him in His sufferings also; and in taking Him again from the hands of Simeon she renews in her heart her union with Him as a victim, and the acceptance she had already made of the sufferings which will merit for her the title of Mother of Sorrows.

APPLICATION.

Life has for us, as for Mary, its consolations and its troubles. Ah! let us learn how to employ both to the advantage of our souls. Let us rejoice in everything that promotes the glory of God; and whenever we see a good act performed let us redouble our efforts, and bless Providence that thus causes the merits of the divine Saviour to bring forth fruit.

Let us expect contradictions, troubles, and sorrows; if they must be the portion of Mary, how much more justly should they be the portion of us, miserable sinners, who deserve that our whole life should be passed in lamentation and tears?

Let us accept all our trials with resignation, tranquillity of soul, and an entire conformity to the will of God. Let us remember that if we desire to reign with Jesus Christ in the abodes of everlasting peace we must, after the example of His Most Blessed Mother, share His chalice, ascend with Him to Mount Calvary, and remain there to the end.

PRAYER.

O Holy Virgin, mother of love and of sorrow, pray for me, I beseech you, and obtain for me the grace to enter into all the designs of Providence, whether for consolation or trial. Grant that, under your blessed protection, I may not oppose my will to that of your divine Son, but that, by my fidelity and submission, I may prove a true consolation to His sacred heart; that, pierced with the sword of love, I may attach myself to Him, to suffer and die with Him, so that when my last hour shall come I may say with Simeon, "Now Thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word, in peace;" . . . . admit Him to behold you in heaven, for on earth you were his only consolation and hope.

See *Résumés*, page 421.

20.—THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.

Take the child and His Mother and fly into Egypt.—ST. MATT. ii. 13.

CONSIDERATION.

INFORMED of the birth of the Messiah, and not knowing what might be the consequences of that great event, Herod feared for his throne, and formed the design of destroying the King who was born to the Jews. Not seeing the Magi return, as he requested them to do, he orders the massacre of all the children of the city of Bethlehem and of the surrounding neighborhood, under two years of age, supposing that he could not thus fail to destroy Him whom his blind and jealous ambition made him so strangely misunderstand.

But as the time for the great sacrifice had not yet arrived, Providence withdrew the divine Infant from the reach of the assassins. An angel appeared to Joseph during his sleep, and said to him, "Arise, and take the child and His Mother and fly into Egypt, . . . for it will come to pass that Herod will seek the child to destroy Him." Joseph immediately arises, communicates to Mary the message he had received from Heaven, and with her and the infant-God at once sets out for Egypt.

Let us admire his courage, his obedience, and his devotedness, and honor him as "the faithful and wise steward whom the Lord setteth over His family," * and who corresponds perfectly to all His designs and executes His divine will. But let us pay a still greater tribute of admiration to the obedience, self-denial, patience, and courage of the Most Blessed Virgin, whose virtues shine with increased splendor in this unexpected and painful emergency.

"Oh, what anguish was it for her," remarks St. Chrysostom, "to have that severe order announced! Fly far from your kindred, abandon the temple of God for the land of idolatry." She must leave the country of her fathers—the only country in which the true God is adored—and that without resources, and it might be said without human means, she must undertake a long and dangerous journey with the adorable Infant who she foresees will be subjected to every kind of privation and suffering.

But the more painful the sacrifice which the Lord requires, the more pleasure she enjoys in making it. She obeys with simplicity and faith, reposing entire confidence in the revelation that was made to Joseph, seeing God in the angel who represented Him, and in Joseph to whom the heavenly communication was made, and who imparted it to her; giving up her mind wholly to the commands of Heaven, without any thought save that of implicit obedience. She did not permit herself, nor did her holy spouse, to question the manner in which it pleased God to withdraw the infant Jesus from the fury of Herod. God said to her, "Go," and she goes; He will say, "Return," and she will return.

She obeys with humility, and was happy because the angel, in addressing Joseph instead of her, subordinates her, by the very act, to her holy spouse in executing what is commanded. She desires the lowest rank, and only

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* St. Luke xii. 42.

aspires to be the humble servant of her virginal spouse. She obeys him with promptitude, and sets out in the midst of darkness, without being able to make any necessary preparation for so long a journey undertaken under such pressing circumstances.

In her obedience she is actuated by the purest motives: she has no purpose but to do the will of Heaven, to save the divine Infant, and to correspond to the other designs of God, which could not have been unknown to her.

We cannot doubt that she is conscious of the fact that this journey will serve for the fulfilment of the prophetic words of Osee: "I called my Son out of Egypt," * and of those of Isaias: "The Lord will ascend upon a swift cloud, and will enter into Egypt; and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at His presence." †

Yes, O Holy Virgin, you are the swift cloud bearing salvation to a strange people; go with your divine Son, for it is not only Judea but all the nations of the earth that are to be blessed in Him; go, so that the star which has risen over the land of Israel may also shine on the horizon of Egypt; so that the people that are seated in darkness and in the shadow of death may open their eyes to that light which is their salvation and life.

The holy family at length perform that painful journey. "Oh! what a heart-rending spectacle," exclaims St. Liguori, "it is to behold that young Virgin thus fleeing with Joseph, carrying in her arms her new-born Son!" "How," asks St. Bonaventure, "do they sustain themselves?" Where do they find shelter for the night? Perhaps they have no food but a little black bread which Joseph may have carried with him or received on the way in charity. Their nights they may have passed in the open fields and afterwards in the desert!

However this may have been, Mary was at all times a

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* Osee xi. 1. † Isaias xix. 1.

prodigy of resignation and courage. She blessed God who willed their flight at this time and in this manner; she trusts in His holy Providence which will not forsake the divine Infant nor those in whose charge He has placed Him. She seeks consolation in Jesus alone, whose caresses, smiles, and looks inundate her heart with a heavenly unction in return for her maternal anxieties and her tender, loving care.

Besides, does she not see Him suffering, and what can she desire for herself but to suffer with Him and for Him?* She reflects, moreover, on the results of this painful journey: the designs of Herod and of hell disconcerted, the prophecies verified, the infant Jesus saved, and the heavenly blessings which He will bring to a strange people.

Yes, her faith and her hope tell her that the sufferings and tears of her divine child will be the seed from which the Thebais will one day arise with its marvels of edification and its legions of saints; and under the influence of such thoughts on entering into a strange land, she utters those words which the Church was afterwards to employ in her office: "Weep no more, O Egypt; behold thy ruler, in whose presence the depths of hell will be shaken, comes to thee to deliver His people from the power of their enemies." †

The Holy Virgin while in Egypt leads a life of retirement and privations; she lavishes on her divine Infant all the care of the most tender of mothers, and devotes herself to constant labor that she may render some assistance to her holy spouse in procuring their daily bread. She prays for the people of Egypt and for all Gentiles; she asks for their conversion, and, to promote so holy an object, she labors, so far as she is able, with the most ardent zeal and the most perfect charity.

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* The Church has preserved the cloth with which the Most Holy Virgin dried the face of the infant Jesus during this journey, and we possess particles of this precious relic in several of our chapels and oratories.

† Fourth response in the matins of the third Sunday of Advent.

APPLICATION.

Let us honor Mary as our most perfect model, and for this purpose let us endeavor to imitate her virtues. Let us obey with faith, humility, promptness, and generosity, remembering that obedience is the cardinal virtue of our state of life. Let us accustom ourselves to sacrifice everything to the will of God.

Let us fortify ourselves with patience and resignation in our sufferings; affliction is the portion of all on earth, and they only are happy who bear it like Mary and the saints. We must not falter in the presence of difficulties; let us do all we can, and rely upon divine Providence, thus imitating the infant Jesus, who, during all the perils of the flight into Egypt, calmly reposed on the bosom of His divine Mother.

Let us labor with courage and confidence in the Christian education of the young, that work of supreme importance, which has for its object to save youth, to rescue from the fury of Herod — that is to say, from the rage of hell — the infant Jesus, whom the eyes of faith behold in every Christian child.

Let us live as travellers journeying toward eternity, attaching ourselves to none but Jesus. After the example of Mary in Egypt, let us persevere in detaching ourselves from the world, in prayer, recollection, labor, and a perfect union with Jesus. To this end let us ask for divine grace, through the intercession of the Most Holy Virgin, and let us faithfully correspond to it; for this is the only sure way to escape the snares of the enemy of our souls, to sanctify the days of our pilgrimage here below, and merit to be called to the joys of our eternal home.

PRAYER.

O divine Mother of my Jesus, who didst devote thyself to save Him from the cruelty of Herod, remember that, as a member of His mystic body, I also am thy child.

O my good Mother, save me from the jealous fury of the enemy of my salvation. You know that he seeks my soul for its everlasting destruction. Oh, in pity shield me from his power; conduct me, by the sure path of virtue, to that blessed abode where I shall no longer fear, and where, with your divine Son, I shall enjoy eternal repose.

See *Résumés*, page 421.

21. — THE RETURN FROM EGYPT.

I called my Son out of Egypt. — OSEE xi. 1.

CONSIDERATION.

IT cannot be doubted that the Holy Family must have suffered much during their sojourn in Egypt. It could not be otherwise than that, being strangers and poor, Joseph and Mary would be slighted, despised, and compelled to undergo severe and constant labor in order to procure necessaries for the infant Jesus as well as for themselves. Their hearts were, besides, deeply moved at the blindness of a whole people, slaves of the devil, and with whom, according to the expression of the eloquent and learned Bossuet, "everything was a god except God Himself."

To these sufferings was added their entire ignorance of how long they would continue, for the angel said, "Fly into Egypt, and be there until I shall tell thee." *

But nothing can disturb the tranquillity of their souls,

* St. Matt. ii. 13.

or subdue their patience and resignation. They return good for evil, they answer insults with prayers, they supply their daily wants by labor, and wherever they go they shed the sweetest perfume of edification.

In the meantime, the hour had arrived when the Holy Family was to quit the land of their exile. The angel appeared again to Joseph, and said to him, "Rise, and take the Child and His Mother and go into the land of Israel, for they are dead who sought the life of the Child." * Joseph, ever obedient to the voice of Heaven, immediately arises, communicates to Mary what had been revealed to him, and, with the infant Jesus, they resume the road to their own country.

Arriving in Egypt in obedience to the command of God revealed in sleep, they depart therefrom in pursuance of a command communicated in a similar manner; and as all their actions are directed solely by grace, they are equally as prompt in executing the latter command as they were in obeying the former. Their determination is biased by no human motives. They hasten to depart, not because the command they have received accords with their own wishes, but because God requires that they should make no delay.

O sublime obedience! O wonderful simplicity of those two souls, the purest, the richest after that of the Man-God that have ever existed. They make so complete an abnegation of themselves — so perfect a sacrifice of their own will — that they seem to have no initiative, no impulse proceeding from themselves. Ah! why do we not act, like them, solely with a view to the commands of God! We would not then experience those vacillations of interior dispositions so frequent and so much to be deplored; we would not then, in practicing the virtue of obedience, be sometimes all ardor, as happens when what is enjoined is agreeable to our own inclinations, and again all coldness, as

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* St. Matt. ii. 20.

is often the case, when what is commanded is distasteful to our self-love or contrary to our wishes.

Faithful images of the heavenly Father who so liberally exercises His divine mercy, or, rather, faithful imitators of the goodness of the Saviour-God, who is with them in person, and whose heart is never weary of pardoning and loving, Mary and Joseph depart from Egypt without a feeling of resentment for what they suffered there, and calling down upon that land of bondage the most abundant blessings of Heaven.

While departing from the land of Egypt, they either meditate or converse together on the religious facts accomplished or to be accomplished, which their present situation suggests to their minds. They think of the slavery which the Hebrews endured; of the danger of death through which Moses passed; of the miracles by which that man of God, the greatest of the prophets, delivered his people and led them to the land of promise. At the same time they consider that they have with them the true Moses, over whom they have watched as Mary, the daughter of Amram, watched over her brother; that He is employed in the deliverance of His new people, who are no other than the whole human race. They see in the near future the gospel spread throughout the world, for they know that the Sun of truth which is to shine over Israel will illuminate with its vivifying rays the whole earth.

While occupied with these subjects of faith, their hearts overflow with gratitude to the Most High. Oh, with what fervor do they bless divine Providence for the tender care with which it watched over them, during their sojourn in Egypt, and for the means with which they were furnished to return to the country of their fathers!

They again enter the desert, where they encounter the same difficulties that they met with when they first crossed it; and again they challenge our admiration by their patience, resignation, and courage, as well as by their devotedness to the infant Jesus, whom they carry or allow to walk, according to His own pleasure, or as His strength may permit, and whose presence animates them, sustains them, and causes them even to take delight in their severest fatigue.

At last, the Holy Family arrive at the frontiers of Israel. Mary and Joseph would desire to go to Bethlehem, where the Saviour was born, and also to Jerusalem to adore God in His temple, and to thank Him for their safe return ; but they dare not do so, because Archelaus reigns in Judea as the successor of his father Herod, and they fear that he inherits the jealousy and cruelty of that tyrant. They, therefore, have recourse to prayer, and an angel having revealed to Joseph the will of God, they repair to Nazareth in Galilee, where they had formerly resided, and where the great Mystery of the Incarnation was accomplished.

Oh ! what emotions penetrate your soul, Most Holy Virgin, on again beholding the humble dwelling in which you received the visit of the angel, and where you became the Mother of God, when you consider, as if grouped together in a single picture, the miracles of grace wrought since that solemn moment !

If, after the deliverance of Israel from the bondage of Egypt, Mary, the sister of Moses, extolled, with such transports of fervor, the goodness and the power of God, with what accents do you not extol and praise Him, you who see not a single people but humanity itself redeemed, by your adorable Son, from the bondage of hell, and placed on the road to the land of promise !

Yes, rejoice, O divine Mother, at the work of the redemption of the world wrought by Jesus, and also by you. Glorify the Lord for His mercy, and bless His divine Providence which, for the days of tribulation through which you have passed, has given you days of tranquillity and peace, which you spend in the company of the infant God, now increasing in years, and manifesting more and more, every day, His infinite wisdom!

APPLICATION.

The devout Lansperg represents Jesus Christ as speaking, and puts in His mouth those words so worthy of our attention: "Children of Adam, who live in the midst of so many enemies, and are exposed to so many miseries, honor, in a most especial manner, my Mother and yours. I have given her to the world as an example and an impregnable fortress, in order that you may learn to imitate her and seek her protection in all your afflictions."

Let Mary, then, be our model, as we desire her to be our refuge.

Like her, let us do everything that God requires of us, and do it because it is the will of God.

In all circumstances, and especially when going on journeys, let us be a source of edification to our neighbor, so that, like Mary, we may leave behind us a perfume of virtue that may promote the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Let us sanctify our joys and our sorrows, so that both may contribute to our spiritual advancement. Let us be resigned and patient under sickness and contradictions, always keeping before our eyes what the Holy Family suffered, and remembering, besides, that the hour of relief will come, that our pilgrimage will have an end, and that, if we have faithfully persevered to the end, God Himself will dry our tears and crown us with eternal glory.

Let us labor with faith, courage, and patience, deriving grace to do so from a constant meditation on the mysteries of the Holy Childhood, a closer union with our adorable Redeemer, and a fervent and trusting recourse to His Most Blessed Mother. Yes, let us always invoke the protection of that Most Glorious Virgin. It is her merciful mission to save us as she saved the infant Jesus. Let us invoke her in all our temptations, troubles, and sorrows, and, through her, we will receive help from on high, and then the peace which victory secures.

PRAYER.

O Holy Virgin, who in your tribulations glorified the Lord in so perfect a manner by your faith, your patience, and your courage, obtain for me the grace that, by your example, I may glorify Him in all the trials I may have to undergo.

Vouchsafe, O Good Mother, to protect me in my pilgrimage here below, so that, escaping from all its perils, I may at length reach that heavenly country which is the sole end of all my hopes.

See *Résumés*, page 422.

22. — MARY AT NAZARETH WITH THE CHILD JESUS.

Take this Child and nurse Him. — EXODUS ii. 9.

CONSIDERATION.

LET us contemplate the Most Holy Virgin, in her humble dwelling in Nazareth, lavishing her affectionate cares on the infant Jesus, and endeavor to realize the emotions that pervade her soul. Oh! how sweet and salutary such reflections will prove to us who are devoted to Christian youth, and to whom God gives, in the person of the Mother of His adorable Son, a perfect model of the virtues it should be our constant endeavor to cultivate.

The Incarnate Word does not yet wish to manifest Himself to the world, and waits until the proper time shall arrive. Son of God, He wishes to be treated as the son of man, and, therefore, appears only as an ordinary child. Mary, having no will but His, treats Him, in the eyes of the world, as any good mother would treat her child; but, in her heart, she never ceases to recognize in Him her Lord and her God, to adore Him with the most profound devotion, and faithfully to render Him the homage of her absolute dependence. Where the natural eye sees only a child growing up like every other child, and whose education requires much care, the eye of faith recognizes a divine Being, the Emmanuel, the God, who, in His goodness and mercy, came down from Heaven, to assume human nature, in that state of infancy and weakness in which it has been since the sin of Adam, and to lead it to that perfection which it ought to attain.

Oh! what must be the feelings that thrill the heart of this glorious Virgin when she looks upon the infant God, under this double aspect, and reflects that she is rearing Him through whom every thing that lives has its being, that she instructs Him who is uncreated knowledge, that she is teaching to praise the Lord Him who is the Lord Himself.

"The Mother of God," says the Pere de Grenada, "found an ineffable joy in the presence and company of her Son. Is it not the experience of all that the presence of that which we love imparts the most exquisite of all pleasures, and that, in proportion as we love it, is the joy we derive from seeing and possessing it. Judge then, from the love which the Most Holy Virgin bore to her Son, what joy she experienced in having Him always near her, in listening to His words, and in contemplating His divine countenance. How often did she remain prostrate, for hours at a time, before the little couch on which He reposed, gazing with rapture on the repose of Him who is always awake to save the world, catching the very breath of Him through whom every living creature breathes."

"Yes, Mary was filled with surprise and admiration, to the very depths of her soul, when, while guiding with the most tender devotion the steps of the Son of the Eternal Father, now become her Son, she caught up from His infant lips some one of those divine secrets which He let escape.* Who can doubt that He impressed on her heart the sentiment of His divinity; that her very soul thrilled under His looks, His endearments, His smiles of love, His words of affection!" †

With what inexpressible emotions must not the happy Mother have been penetrated during those different incidents of the Holy Family which had no other witnesses than the angelic spirits, but which Christian piety can easily shape into words!

What does she experience when the divine Infant, awaking from sleep, raises His first look to His Eternal Father in Heaven, and then casts His eyes upon her with a smile of love! How profound her feelings when she sees Him so submissive to herself and St. Joseph! How He respects, honors, and obeys her, executing whatever she desires, and even anticipating her wishes.

But, here, let us give full scope to our reflections. Let us consider her, for example, reading the Holy Scriptures as was then done by all the faithful observers of the law. Oh! what feelings did those sacred pages, which she so thoroughly comprehended, and each one of which referred, directly or indirectly, to her divine Son, excite in her maternal bosom. In Him she beheld that Redeemer who was promised to Adam and Eve in the garden of Paradise; that Messiah prefigured by all the holy persons who had appeared in the world, recalled to people's minds by all the symbols of figurative religion, foretold by all the prophets, and designated by the glorious titles of Eternal Priest, Ruler, Emmanuel. She recognized and adored the God of Mount

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* M. D. Bouix. † St. Bernardine of Sienna.

Sinai in that divine Infant, full of grace, whose words are sweetness itself.

What does she experience when He is in prayer, when she hears Him implore His heavenly Father, when she sees Him lifting up to Heaven those divine hands which alone can bring down mercy upon the human race; or, when united with St. Joseph, she prays with Him, and feels that He unites their prayers to His own, and thus renders them infinitely more precious in the eyes of the Most High!

"No, no," says St. Anselm, "no one ever experienced in a like degree with Mary how sweet the Lord is. She was inebriated with good things from the house of the Lord, and she drank from the torrent of His delights. At this we should not be astonished, because near her was He who is the fountain of life and the source of every good." Is it not written, "Her conversation hath no bitterness, nor her company any tediousness, but joy and gladness?" * No one has enjoyed, in the same degree with Mary, the conversation of Uncreated Wisdom. "If," continues the Pere de Grenada, "in the pious contemplation of the Saviour, the saints were ravished with joy, what, then, must be the transports of His Most Holy Mother, who so far surpasses all the saints in grace and in love, and who had Him constantly before her eyes? No, language fails to describe it." Under the inspiration of her faith and love, Mary devotes herself to the infant Jesus. With what solicitude she anticipates His every want! With what cheerfulness she works for Him! With what affectionate eagerness she renders Him those services which His tender years require! What a picture is here presented to our piety! Mary sees her God extend to her His little hands to receive the bread necessary for His subsistence! Oh! what happiness she feels in giving it to Him, and what exertions

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* Wisdom viii. 16.

would she not make to procure it for Him if the labor of St. Joseph did not suffice!

Her devotedness to Jesus is active, courageous, careful, earnest, persevering, and untiring, for she is to be the perfect model of devotedness to those whom God has called to consecrate themselves to the service of their neighbor, and particularly to those who are charged with the Christian education of youth.

APPLICATION.

In imitation of Mary, let us be animated with faith and charity in all our relations with children. Let us not look upon our pupils from the standpoint of nature, which is full of so many perils to us, but rather by the light of the great principles of religion. Let us see in them creatures whom God loves, and whom He calls to reign with Him — immortal souls for whom Jesus Christ came into this world and shed His precious blood. Let us behold in them the infant Jesus Himself who dwells in their hearts and whose representatives they are to us.

Let us regard them as Mary regarded the infant Jesus; let us act toward them as if they were sacred vessels, temples, tabernacles. Let us always remember that they are members of Jesus Christ, children of Mary and of the Church, the protégés of St. Joseph and of their other holy patrons; that they are always accompanied by an angel who sees continually the face of their Heavenly Father, and who will plead in our favor or accuse us before Him, as we shall discharge toward them the duties of our holy vocation.

Let us love our pupils, but with a worthy, pure, and noble love, proceeding from reason, and still more so from faith. Let us love them from motives of the supernatural order; let us love their souls, which, if they have the happiness to work out their salvation, will shine in heaven with the beauty of God Himself. Let us love them all, because all have an equal right to the supernatural love we should feel toward them, and to which every natural feeling of an opposite character should give place.

Let us be animated with the purest, the most courageous, the most attentive, and the most persevering zeal, and devote ourselves to them as much as possible, thereby imitating Mary and Joseph in their devotion to the infant Jesus.

PRAYER.

O Most Holy Virgin, O sweet Mother of my Saviour, remember that you are also the Mother of the children confided to us. Deign, we beseech you, to interest yourself in their behalf, and obtain for us the grace to regard them with eyes of faith, to love them with a supernatural love, and be successful in the work of their Christian education. Grant that, through your intercession, our labors may be blessed, and that they may be the means by which we shall one day contemplate with you in glory the adorable Infant, for whose sake we have consecrated ourselves to our holy state and to behold whom constitutes the glory of the elect.

See *Résumés*, page 412.

23.—JOSEPH AND MARY BRING THE CHILD TO JERUSALEM.

Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?—St. Luke ii. 49.

CONSIDERATION.

FAITHFUL observers of the law, Mary and Joseph went up yearly to Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover, and when the child Jesus had reached His twelfth year they brought Him up there with them. Let us follow them on this pious pilgrimage, which they make in company with several of their acquaintances. Let us contemplate the adorable Jesus affording consolation to all who composed the company. Let us behold Him, now with Joseph in the group of men, again with Mary among the women, all grace and inexpressible sweetness.

Arriving at Jerusalem, the Holy Family repair to the temple, and there, prostrating themselves, they adore God while the priests offer the prescribed sacrifices. Oh! what sentiments penetrate the heart of Jesus! He is at Jerusalem where He is to be immolated; He sees slain before His eyes the figurative pascal lamb, and He feels that He is the true Pascal Lamb, the victim whose bloody sacrifice will save men from the sword of the exterminating angel, and will lead them forth from the bondage of Satan to the liberty of the children of God.

Mary and Joseph, seeing the reality beyond the symbolical sacrifices, unite themselves with Jesus, adore Him as the true victim, and, offering themselves as victims with Him, properly dispose themselves for the severe trials which Providence has reserved for them.

The Incarnate Word, on entering into life, manifested His divinity by the appearance of the angel to the shepherds of Bethlehem, and by the miraculous star which guided the Magi. Now, again, He desires to show that He has entered on His youthhood, and, to that end, to give a manifestation of His infinite knowledge and wisdom, He desires to prepare the way for His divine mission by causing a ray of that divine light which was to enlighten the world to shine in the temple of Jerusalem. He wishes to show that He is more than an ordinary child, and that He is subject to Mary and Joseph only in His humanity, but that as God He obeys only His Heavenly Father. He would also teach us by His example to sacrifice every natural affection when the interests of God's glory demand it, and to prepare Mary, His co-operatrix in man's redemption, for the agonizing separation of Mount Calvary.

When the days of the solemnity had passed Mary and Joseph returned home, but Jesus remained at Jerusalem. This they did not observe, because, doubtless, Mary believed that He was with Joseph in the company of the men, and Joseph supposed Him to be with Mary in that of the women. When it was evening they discovered that He was not with them. What were their astonishment and grief? They seek Him among their acquaintances, but no one has seen Him, nor could any one give them any information on the subject.

Oh, how are their souls agonized! How were they to explain his disappearance? Could the day of the bloody sacrifice have come? Had He reached the age at which He was to be delivered up and put to death? They know not what to think. The measure of their love is the measure of their grief. At that moment the sword foretold by Simeon enters and pierces the heart of Mary. Ah! behold her tears and listen to her words of bereavement: "My tears have become my bread day and night, for I ask myself, Where is my God,* where is my Son? And who can now give me comfort, since He who is the light of my eyes itself is not with me?" †

Up to that time Mary and Joseph had suffered with Jesus, whose presence was to them a source of supernatural courage; now, they suffer without Him, or, rather, it is His absence which is the cause of their deep anguish. They are not, however, wholly cast down, for in their desolation they give more glory to God by their patience, their resignation, their trust, than did Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Tobias, or Job, in the trials to which His Providence had subjected them. They besought Him to give them back the treasure He had confided to them, and that they might recover it they resume the road to Jerusalem and make the most diligent inquiries.

The divine Saviour was there in the temple, hearing and questioning the doctors of the law, answering their questions, and manifesting in His words and demeanor a wisdom not only superior to His years but which won the admiration of all.

It was there that Mary and Joseph at length found Him, after three days of search and tears. What joy did it bring to their souls! Of what a load of grief were their hearts relieved! Mary, however, in a tone of tenderness and love, told Him what they had suffered on His account: "Son, why hast thou done so to us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." ‡

Here let us thoughtfully ponder the first words known to man that came from the lips of the divine Word: "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" §

Oh, what lessons of instruction He gives us here! He announces Himself to be infallible Wisdom; He reveals

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* Ps. xli. 4. † Ibid. xxxvii. 11. ‡ St. Luke ii. 48.

§ Ibid. ii. 49.

Himself the Son of God; He proclaims that He is charged by His Father with a mission of a supernatural order, to which all the claims of flesh and blood must be subordinated. He teaches us that the first occupation of a Christian should be what relates to the service of God.

Mary and Joseph were filled with wonder; they did not understand His words, for they were yet ignorant of what He had done during those three days, and how He had glorified His Heavenly Father. Besides, they did not think that the time for manifesting His divinity was yet come, and they did not know why He should anticipate that day which, in reality, was not to dawn upon the world for eighteen years yet to come. The divine Infant, however, resuming His character of subjection and obedience, cast Himself into their arms, and with Him they returned to Nazareth, praising and blessing God, who comforted them even more than they had been afflicted.

APPLICATION.

Let us learn, from what Mary and Joseph experienced in seeking the divine Infant, that there is no happiness comparable to that of possessing Jesus, as there is no misfortune more to be deplored than that of being separated from that Sovereign Good. Ah! let us ever be vigilant over ourselves that we may not lose Jesus, who will absolutely withdraw Himself from us if we are so unhappy as to fall into mortal sin, and whose active grace even venial sin will repel from us, thus abandoning us to ourselves and to all the anguish resulting from a privation of His sensible presence.

Sometimes that privation is designed only as a trial, as was the case with Mary and Joseph. Happy then are those who, resigned to the will of God, act conformably to the exhortation of St. Liguori: "Let those souls who have ceased to enjoy as formerly the presence of the Saviour, weep, but with the calmness of Mary; let them feel confident that they will thus recover what they have lost. If the Lord veils Himself for a time from their eyes, He still abides in their hearts. He hides Himself that He may be sought after with increased love.

"O presence, O absence of my dear Master!" exclaims St. Bernard; "the first is vouchsafed for our greater comfort; the second serves as our greatest merit. In the divine presence the soul delights in Jesus; in its absence, Jesus delights in the soul."

But in all circumstances the absence of that beloved One is painful. We should therefore always be with Jesus, and if we are separated from Him, even for a moment, we should at once seek Him with diligence and prayer.

We must not seek Him in the world, among our relations and friends, but in the temple, in the person of the priest who absolves us in His name, and in the Blessed Sacrament by which He gives Himself to us. Let us seek Him in prayer and meditation, which are the channels by which He enters into our heart; and when we have found Him again, let us cling steadfastly to Him as long as we live.

PRAYER.

Of all misfortunes, O Most Blessed Virgin, is it not infinitely the greatest to lose Jesus by sin? Of all trials, is not the privation of His presence the most unendurable? O divine Mother, who suffered so much from the temporary separation from your adorable Son, obtain for me the grace rather to die a thousand deaths than to lose Him by sin, and of corresponding so faithfully to His merciful designs, when He hides Himself from me, as a trial of my fidelity and submission to His divine will, that I may soon find Him again, and be preserved in union with Him until that union is consummated in eternal glory.

See *Résumés*, page 423.

24. — MARY BEFORE THE PREACHING OF JESUS.

He was subject to them. — ST. LUKE ii. 51.

CONSIDERATION.

LET us contemplate the Holy Family in their humble dwelling in Nazareth during the years which followed the finding of the infant Jesus in the temple. How delightful and attractive is the spectacle which they present to the eyes of our piety and faith!

We can form no conception, say the holy fathers, of the virtues and dignity of the persons who compose that earthly trinity which has nothing above it but the Trinity in heaven. No one can conceive the sublimity of their conversation, the fervor of their prayers, and the holiness of their lives. We have here the true model of every family, of every community, and of every society; for there is the most perfect union, authority, subordination, respect, co-operation, kindness, devotedness, labor, and prayer. In the exterior order Joseph is above Mary, and both are above Jesus; but in the interior order the child-God occupies the first rank, His Most Holy Mother the second, and His foster-father the third; and these two orders, each completing the other, render every exercise of authority and every act of obedience sublime and wonderful.

When giving orders to Mary, Joseph knows that he is speaking to the holiest and most elevated in dignity of all creatures; when giving a command to Jesus, Joseph and Mary understand fully that they address the Most High God, the Lord of angels. With what respect and veneration, then, do they not approach Him on such occasions?

Yes, the very exercise of their authority is the most sublime act of their obedience!

Jesus is subjected to Mary and Joseph; the Master of Heaven makes Himself the servant of His creatures! What a prodigy of abasement! but, at the same time, what an elevation to those to whom He makes Himself subject! "If, on the one side," says St. Bernard, "there is humility without an example, there is, on the other, distinction without a parallel." Yes, Mary and Joseph are great, distinguished even by the very submission of Jesus.

But let us consider the members of the Holy Family in the work they respectively perform. As a carpenter, Joseph works at his trade with faith, trust in divine Providence, purity of intention, self-denial, and courage, and as the divine Child grows in strength he associates Him with himself in his work.

Ah! what a spectacle! What a lesson here for pride and ambition! The Creator of the world stoops to the occupation of an ordinary mechanic! Uncreated Wisdom, the Word of God becomes the apprentice of an humble artisan! During long years He appears but as an ordinary mechanic, toiling incessantly at His laborious work. And yet He is the Messiah promised to the world, and so ardently desired by all generations; He is the Son of David, the true Solomon whose greatness was to surpass all greatness! O wisdom of the world, how dost thou stand confounded!

But what are the dispositions and the occupations of Mary, the constant witness of the humiliations of the Son of God? She sees Him growing "in wisdom and age and grace with God and men," * presenting Himself as the model of childhood and youth, increasing in strength, and every day exhibiting some new proof of His infinite wisdom. She admires Him while He is realizing those words

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* St. Luke ii. 52.

of the prophet: "Verily, Thou art a hidden God;"* she adores Him in her soul while He is fulfilling the designs of His Heavenly Father, undergoing the penalty of man's guilt by earning His bread with the sweat of His brow, thus giving an example of the most complete self-denial, while He sanctifies and ennobles the condition of the artisan.

Her heart and soul are incessantly occupied with the divine Child, not only as an object of her love, but also of her imitation. Happy in having Him constantly before her eyes, in conversing with Him, in being the depository of His thoughts, she closely watches His every word and act, and ponders them in the depth of her heart. Above all, she applies herself to discover and thoroughly comprehend His interior dispositions, in order that she may the more fully conform herself to Him.

Like Him, and from the same motives, she labors according to the measure of her strength. Oh! what a glorious subject of admiration is it to behold the Virgin Mother of God, the Queen of Heaven, occupied with the cares of an humble household, making up the clothes of the whole family, as was the custom with Jewish women; drawing water for domestic purposes, and preparing the meals for her Son and her spouse!

Yes, it is most grateful to our piety to dwell on these details on which the Heavenly Father looked with complacency; to consider those occupations, so ordinary in themselves, but which were sanctified by the most perfect charity and honored with the thanks of the Incarnate Word Himself. Mary united, in the most perfect manner, the active with the contemplative life. She was, at the same moment, absorbed in God and devoted to the work on which she was employed. "She occupied herself," says St. Thomas of Villanova, "in serving her Son and her spouse in such a manner that she never for a moment ceased to think of Heaven." She prayed and worked, while her prayer facilitated her work and her work strengthened her prayer.

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* Isaias xlv. 15.

She loved retirement, which is so favorable to the spirit of devotion and the operation of grace in our hearts; but she also knew how to withdraw from it when the duties of her state of life demanded her presence. All her intercourse with her neighbor was inspired by goodness, benevolence, justice, and courtesy.

She corresponded also to the designs of God, whose holy will it was that she should perfectly imitate the hidden and the active life of the Saviour, that she might teach men by her example that holiness does not consist in extraordinary acts, but rather in an entire submission to the divine will and an earnest desire to faithfully discharge all the duties of our holy state.

APPLICATION.

Let us frequently contemplate Jesus, our Lord and our God, in the life of obscurity and labor which He led in Nazareth. With Mary, let us adore Him in His self-humiliation, so full of mystery and instruction, and let us strive to imitate the example He gives us. Let us labor with earnestness, courage, and perseverance, and, above all, in a spirit of self-sacrifice, remembering that our divine Jesus has also labored and toiled, as did Mary and Joseph, and that nothing could be more dishonorable, and unworthy a Christian, than to falter in our efforts to walk in their footsteps.

Let us be employed only in what God requires of us: to occupy ourselves with anything else is illusion and peril. Let us make it our chief and only aim to discharge well the duties of our state.

With Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, let us be animated with the sole desire of glorifying God, of doing His holy will, of drawing down His blessings upon the earth. Let us labor from the purest motives of religion and faith, which alone can render our works acceptable to God and meritorious in His divine presence. Let us cherish among ourselves the true family spirit, delighting to render a service to our brethren. Let our intercourse with them be marked by kindness and sweetness, in order that our whole Community may be, so far as depends on us, an image of that which was composed of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Let our piety be united with the most affectionate charity, and the kindest attention to the happiness of our neighbor.

Let us not seek perfection in rare or extraordinary acts, but rather in those which are habitual to us; and if, as generally happens, we are assigned to ordinary duties, let us try to discharge them in an extraordinary manner.

How profitable will such a course of conduct prove to us! It will make every moment of our lives contribute to the glory of God, to merit grace for ourselves, and to render ourselves worthy of mercy now and eternal glory hereafter.

PRAYER.

O Mary, perfect model of devotion, deign to cast your eyes upon your poor servant, so prone, alas! to deceive himself in regard to his duties as a good and pious Religious. Obtain for me the grace to make it consist, above all else, in the full discharge of the duties of my state, in renouncing my own will, and in a pure, active, kind, and generous charity toward my neighbor. Oh, grant by your merciful and all-powerful protection, that, conforming in all things and always to the will of God, as made known to me by my rules and the directions of my Superiors, I may be admitted, at the moment of my death, into the number of those faithful servants who, having studied and fulfilled the will of the Sovereign Master, share with you His eternal glory in the splendor of heaven.

See *Résumés*, page 423.

25. — MARY AT THE DEATH OF ST. JOSEPH.

I will sleep with my fathers. — GEN. xlvii. 30.

CONSIDERATION.

IN the designs of the Most High, Joseph had not been destined, like Mary, to witness the preaching and miracles of Jesus and His immolation on Mount Calvary. His mission was, principally, to protect the infant God and the Virgin Mother, and it was to terminate before the Saviour should enter upon His public life. A day of profound affliction was, then, soon to disturb the course of the peaceful years that the Holy Family were enjoying in Nazareth. God was about to call to Himself the faithful servant He had placed at its head.

The holy patriarch yields to age, but much more to fatigue, and, instead of disguising his condition, he exclaims, with Jacob, "I will sleep with my fathers."

Oh! what a trial for Mary, who loved him with an affection as fervent as it was pure and holy! Oh! what anguish rent her heart, the prelude of that inexpressible anguish she will experience on that great day when she will witness the agony and death of Jesus on the cross.

It is because she was to be the model and patroness of persons of all states and conditions that she must suffer the anguish which we experience at the loss of those who are dear to us, and pass the remainder of her days in the solitude and sadness of widowhood. Appointed protectrix of all who are in suffering and sorrow, it was fit that she should commence the functions of that character while on earth, and discharge them toward her spouse, who entertained for her a devotion so heroic and so constant. Moreover, God wished to exhibit to us the Most Holy Virgin lavishing on the dying Joseph the cares of a most tender and attentive charity, thus opening that honorable path in which so many persons were to follow her, devoting themselves without reserve to assist and comfort the sick, and prepare, for a better life, those who are in the agonies of death.

Let us, then, consider Mary beside the sick bed of her virginal spouse. Ah! who can describe the depth of her grief when she looks upon that angelic face over which the pallor of death is spreading apace; that venerable brow, moist with the sweat-drops of his mortal agony; those eyes, the mirror of a soul so pure, growing dim to the light of earth; those blessed lips, which so often pronounced the sweet name of Jesus, parched and colorless? Her faith and her piety, it is true, inspire her with fortitude under her sufferings, but they do not diminish them. She is resigned, perfectly resigned; but her very resignation supposes that she is profoundly afflicted. Yes, her immaculate heart is crushed, and her eyes are bathed in tears.

However, she suppresses her own grief that she may the better bestow all her cares on her holy spouse. Oh! what attention, what devotion, what affectionate solicitude does she not bestow on him! If holy, tender charity is of itself ingenious in devising means of relief and comfort, what must it have suggested on an occasion like this to Mary, in whose soul it reigned over every other sentiment, and to whom the piety of the faithful was to award those glorious titles: "Health of the weak," "Comfortress of the afflicted," "Hope of all who are suffering."

Oh! can we doubt that her looks interrogated her divine Son, as if to ask Him if it accorded with His adorable designs to prolong the days that were so precious to her, and that Jesus tenderly made her understand that such was not the will of His Father. She unceasingly consoles and inspires with fortitude her dying spouse, expressing to him by her looks, her words, her devotedness, the share she has in his sufferings, the sorrow she will experience in being separated from him; and she blesses him for all he has done in his devotion to her, and particularly in his devotion to Jesus.

She prays for him; she asks her Sovereign Lord to reward the fidelity of His servant by assigning to him the highest throne in heaven, soothing his last moments, thus giving him a foretaste here below of that happiness which was reserved for him in the mansions of everlasting glory.

On his part, Joseph forgets all his sufferings to comfort her, and begs the Lord to reward her for her devotion. Finding his last moments draw near, he bids her farewell, but oh! a farewell that no other mortal lips could utter; for it signified, "I quit you to go to sleep with my fathers, but I leave you to God, under the protection of God, who has become your Son, and who will take care of you Himself."

Yes, and Jesus is there to receive Mary from the hands of Joseph, and He will not only soothe the last moments of His foster-father, but, by a special manifestation, will inundate him with a heavenly joy, and change the agonies of death into ecstacies of happiness. And thus speaks the Church: "Joseph, when about to die, was filled with heavenly joy, and expired in a sweet sleep."

Mary understands what extraordinary grace was bestowed on Joseph, yet she is overwhelmed with the deepest affliction. Oh, how her heart, endued with the tenderest sensibility, is crushed and bleeding at the spectacle of her holy spouse cold in death! What bitter tears does she shed over the death-bed of him whom she loved in God with such devoted affection!

Those tears she sheds on the bosom of Jesus, to whom she now looks for comfort. Prostrating herself in the presence of her Heavenly Father, she pours out her soul in all the ardor of the most fervent prayer; she offers to Him her heart, pierced anew with the sword of grief, but which ceases not for a moment to adore Him and bless His holy will. She asks for herself, as well as for all who are in affliction, the grace whereby they may enter into His holy designs and glorify Him at all times by entire resignation to the decrees of His Providence.

Finally, let us contemplate her assisting her divine Son in rendering the last duties to him whose loss she deplores, venerating that body already consecrated by the pure soul which inhabited it, and consecrated anew by the Incarnate Word touching it with His sacred hands. Animated with faith, she honors those precious remains, which are to become a splendid ornament in the heavenly Jerusalem on the day when He who is "the resurrection and the life" * shall raise Joseph again from his grave, and admit him to participate, body and soul, in the fulness of eternal life.

APPLICATION.

Let us honor Mary at the death-bed of Joseph, and let us practice the exalted virtues of which she has there given us so glorious an example.

Let the most tender and attentive charity be our moving principle in all our relations with our neighbor, and particularly when he is in suffering. Let us affectionately give to our sick and infirm all the care which their condition requires. Let us be especially attentive to all who are in danger of death, and assist them with all the means in our power in passing from time to eternity.

In all our trials let us be resigned to the will of God. When His hand weighs heavily upon those who are dear to us, or upon ourselves, let us be faithful in glorifying Him by an entire submission to the decrees of His Providence.

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* St. John xi. 25.

Let these be our dispositions, especially when death takes from us our relations and friends. We may weep for them, but let our sorrow give way to the suggestions of faith, and to sentiments of resignation and heavenly hope. Let us remember that they only leave us for a time, and that, one day, we shall see them again in the bosom of God.

Finally, let us think of ourselves, and prepare for that last hour when the Lord will summon us into His presence. Let us lead a life of justice, like our blessed patron St. Joseph. Let us endeavor to merit, by our piety and faithfulness in every duty, the assistance of Mary in all our trials, and particularly in our dying agony, so that our last conflict may be our victory over the enemy of our salvation, and open to us the gates of the eternal city.

PRAYER.

O Mary, to whom the piety of the faithful has given the titles of "Our Lady of good succor," "Health of the weak," "Protectress of the dying," grant that we may realize the full signification of those titles so dear to your heart. Assist us in all our tribulations; help us when sick; pray for us during this our life of conflict, and particularly at the hour of our death, so that we may overcome all the attacks of our enemies, and leave this valley of tears only to enter into that abode of happiness where, with St. Joseph, you reign forever, at the right hand of your divine Son. Amen.

See *Résumés*, page 424.

26. — MARY AFTER THE DEATH OF JOSEPH.

The Lord ruleth me: and I shall want nothing. — Ps. xxii. 1.

CONSIDERATION.

IN the designs of Providence, Mary was to be a model for every condition of life in which men could be placed; it was, therefore, necessary that she should experience all the sorrows of widowhood, so that she might be looked up to as a model by all who are in mourning and tears.

The Most Blessed Virgin wept at the death of her virginal spouse. Ah! this was not a weakness in her, but a proper tribute to nature, an expression of her deep sorrow, a homage rendered to the purest and most heroic virtue. Religion chastens, regulates and ennobles the natural sentiments; it purifies them of everything excessive or irregular, but it does not extinguish them. Ah! if Jesus was to shed tears over the grave of Lazarus, why should not Mary weep over that of Joseph? Why should she not cherish that holy sorrow caused by the loss which she had just sustained?

The motives of her affection for Joseph, being of a supernatural and unchangeable order, death could not destroy them. She loves him now, as she loved him when living; she cherishes for him the same veneration and gratitude; she thinks of him, and derives consolation from her thoughts. She sees him, with the eyes of faith, beyond the tomb; and the day is already, as it were, present to her, in hope, when she will rejoin him in the city of peace.

Mary thinks of Joseph, and, at the same time, of all the just who, with him, repose in the bosom of Abraham, awaiting the day when the gates of Heaven shall be opened to them. She thinks, also, of those who are detained in the place of expiation, and who must be purified before joining those who were found worthy to enter into glory; and, in recalling them to mind, she prays for them, and asks for their deliverance, through the merits of the labors and sufferings of her divine Son.

In her widowhood, Mary leads a life of retirement, prayer, and labor. How carefully does she shun the world, with its distractions and vanity, so full of danger and so little capable of affording true consolation.

Ah! she desires only that silence and solitude which permit her freely to pour out her soul in the bosom of God; but, above all, prayer constitutes her habitual occupation, and, in this manner, she sanctifies all her other duties. How well she knows that prayer is the balm for all the sufferings of the heart; that nothing is more effectual, if not to dry the tears of sorrow, at least to assuage our grief and restore tranquillity; that it is the sweet bond that unites us to those whose loss we deplore.

Mary does not yield herself wholly to the influence of her grief; she labors as she was accustomed to do when Joseph was living, and she devotes herself to the service of Jesus. What a picture is here presented for our contemplation, and what salutary lessons does it not teach us! Jesus succeeds Joseph in the humble occupations of a carpenter; by His daily labors, he provides for His own wants and those of His Most Holy Mother. O divine workman, with what ardor do you prosecute your daily toil! What an example of the love of children towards their parents do you give us! How eloquently you teach us humility, self-denial, constancy, and courage in the duties of our state of life!

Mary fully comprehends the lesson, and makes it the rule of her life. Ah! what feelings possess her soul when she sees her Lord and her God, the Sovereign Architect of the universe, by whose power worlds are poised in the realms of space, toiling for her, employing Himself in the usual occupations of a common mechanic, demanding His earnings at the close of the day, and then giving them to her from His own adorable hands! Before such annihilation of Supreme Greatness what can she do but, with Jesus, most profoundly humble herself to adore, with Him, the Sovereign Majesty of the Heavenly Father!

O house of Nazareth, what mysteries have your blessed walls veiled from the eyes of the world! Ah! shall we ever know the affectionate courtesies and tender attentions to each other of Jesus and His Divine Mother, of whom He is the only companion! What love presides over their happy hearth! What holy converse sanctifies the hours they spend together! What prayers ascend to heaven from their domestic sanctuary! . . . No, no, nothing can give us even a faint conception of those wonders which ravish with delight the entire heavenly host!

On her part, Mary devotes herself entirely to Jesus, and she can say, in the fullest meaning of the expression, "I am the handmaid of the Lord." * With what attentive solicitude she bestows on Him all a mother's care!

Oh! how can we contemplate the scenes of their life, so intimately united in every thought and duty, without being penetrated with the sweetest and most lively emotions! The Queen of Heaven esteems it her greatest glory and happiness to be the servant of a mechanic, thus honoring the King of kings, who appears Himself only as the servant of all!

O human pride, how you must stand abashed in that humble abode, which is more noble than the temple of Jerusalem, and yet, in appearance, is but the dwelling of a carpenter and His Mother! Yet, from that lowly cottage there comes forth the most wonderful revolution in the

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* St. Luke i. 38.

world that shall ever be known; for, henceforth, men who are docile to the influence of divine grace shall esteem humiliation their greatest glory, and the service of their neighbor their truest dignity. Contemplating, in the deep abyss of their abasement in which we now find them, God, their Redeemer, and His Most Holy Mother, they will learn that it is only by humbling themselves, by annihilating self as much as possible, they can acquire that resemblance to them which constitutes the true happiness of the Christian in this life, and confers on him, in the life to come, the right to share the glory and happiness of the Most High Himself.

APPLICATION.

Let us never forget that the first characteristic of true devotion to Mary must be the imitation of the virtues of that Divine Mother. Let us, then, seriously keep this before our eyes, and endeavor to imitate Mary by all the means which our state of life affords.

Let us serve the Lord with all the fidelity and fervor of which, by His grace, we are capable. He is a master so good, so kind, so generous, that it is impossible for us to be really happy unless in doing His holy will. That holy will is made known to us by His Gospel, by our rules, and by the orders of our Superiors. Let our love for Him be our sole motive in living conformably to it.

Let us serve the Lord in the person of our neighbor. Let us see Jesus in our brethren and in our pupils, who, viewed through the light of faith, are, in truth, His temples, His members, His representatives, His second self.

Let us see Him in ourselves, in whom He dwells by His grace and His spirit; let us see Him in our churches, in the adorable Sacrament of the Altar. Let us live with Him and for Him. Let us remember His favors and the love He has shown us, and let us love Him in return, and consecrate ourselves to His honor and glory, and to the accomplishment of His divine purpose.

Let us honor Mary in her widowhood, and, if death strikes down any one dear to us, let us recall the dispositions of faith, piety, and resignation of our good Mother. Let us seek our consolation in Jesus, at the foot of His Altar, by a fervent communion, for it is the words that He whispers in the very depths of our heart, which alone can heal its wounds. Let us think of our friends who have gone before us, and pray for them. Let us remember that soon we must follow them. Oh happy, then, shall we be, if we have imitated the examples we admire in Mary, for then we shall be admitted to contemplate her in Heaven, and share in that happiness which is the undying crown of her virtues.

PRAYER.

O Virgin Mother of our God, who didst so perfectly correspond to all His designs, and art so powerful with Him, be our guide and our succor. Holy comfortress of the afflicted, obtain for us the grace to profit by the trials with which Providence may visit us. Grant, by your intercession, that they may serve to disengage us from creatures, and attach us more closely to your divine Son ; that in Him alone we may seek consolation ; that they may cleanse our hearts of everything that saddens or displeases Him, and unite us to Him more and more until, with you, we shall be united to Him forever in Heaven.

See *Résumés,* page 424.

27. — MARY DURING THE PREACHING OF JESUS.

Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it. — St. Luke xi. 28.

CONSIDERATION.

THE Incarnate Word, who came on earth to enlighten and to save men, revealed Himself at His entrance into the world; but afterwards He hides Himself, as it were, under an impenetrable cloud, in appearing only as the son of Joseph, the carpenter, or as following the trade of a carpenter Himself.

His Most Holy Mother admires the mysteries of this life of silence, seclusion, and voluntary annihilation, and deeply ponders them in her breast. Ardently desiring the redemption of the world, she is constantly wishing for the great manifestations which her adorable Son is to make of Himself. She prays that that divine Sun, now near its zenith, would burst forth from the clouds that hide it from the eyes of men, and flood the earth with His vivifying rays.

Everything reveals to her that the days of grace she so ardently desires will soon come upon the world. The banks of the Jordan re-echo the preaching of John the Baptist; that holy precursor is accomplishing his mission; he declares to the Jews that he is not the Christ, but he also announces to them that Christ is now on the earth.

Mary, informed of these facts, knows that the public life of Jesus will soon commence, and she earnestly prays to Heaven that men may profit by the graces about to be offered to them; that they may receive, with faith and obedience, the seed of divine truth, and cause it to bring forth fruit in their souls.

Soon she sees the divine workman withdraw from the carpenter's bench, retire to the desert to fast and pray, and then go and mingle with the crowd to receive the baptism of John.

She is informed of the testimony borne by the heavenly Father to His divine character, in the miraculous words: "This is My Beloved Son," and by the Holy Ghost, in descending upon Him, in the form of a dove.*

What holy joy fills her soul, when she sees Him gather around Him His first disciples, and begin the formation of His Church — of that holy society which is to spread over and change the world! With what holy transports does she bless God for the new Jerusalem, with its glorious destiny! With what fervor of soul does she pray Him to send an army of Evangelical laborers, so that the great work of the regeneration of souls may be the sooner accomplished.

In the meantime, Jesus speaks to the crowd; the Jews listen to him with wonder and astonishment, and ask each other whence came so much knowledge and wisdom. Many believe in Him, but large numbers refuse to do so, and contradict Him, loving "darkness rather than light, for their works were evil." † His Most Holy Mother, as St. Thomas of Villanova and the Pere de Grenada inform us, accompanied Him on His preaching. Among the pious women who follow Him, she is the first, the most eager, and the most attentive in hearing His divine words. Ah! with what dispositions does she receive them! Upon what soil does the Evangelical seed fall in her heart!

Mary receives the lessons of divine instruction with the most entire, submissive and universal faith. If Elizabeth's salutation was: "Blessed art thou that hast believed," ‡ how much more worthy of even higher commendation is her faith now that she listens to the Lord Himself. In Jesus, she adores Uncreated wisdom, the Word of God enlightening the minds of men, and she receives all He says with the greatest esteem, the most profound respect, and the most religious veneration. Does she not know that every word that falls from the lips of her divine Son is a beacon of salvation for humanity; that all He says proceeds from a heart consumed with the fires of his love for man, and is designed solely for the regeneration of the children of Adam, and their supreme happiness? Does she not know that, for pious souls, each one of His instructions is an inextinguishable flame of the purest light? Does she not foresee what will be the effects, upon individuals and nations, of the Gospel; with what rapidity it will spread from country to country, even to the utmost limits of the earth, everywhere bringing within its blessed influence the minds and hearts of men?

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* St. Luke iii. 22. † St. John iii. 19. ‡ St. Luke i. 45.

Mary listens to the divine words of her Son with love, gratitude, and a will to put them in practice, of the perfection of which we can form no adequate conception. She knows that the Truth is given to men to serve as the rule of their lives; that the teachings of Him who is the true Light are designed to lead us into the ways of holiness, and that it is by our fidelity in observing them and putting them in practice that we can prove our gratitude to their divine author.

Mary cherishes in her heart, and constantly meditates on, the truths which the Saviour announces. Nothing affords her sweeter consolation than to keep them always before her mind; to comprehend them in their full meaning; to contemplate them in their effects; to admire their sublimity, and make them serve as the means of raising her soul more fully to God. Seat of wisdom and Queen of apostles, she equally esteemed it a happiness to repeat them to those with whom she came in contact, as well as to exhort them to put them in practice. Oh! how persuasive must have been her zealous appeals, springing, as they did, from the most tender charity, and sanctioned by the example of a life so pure and holy that it ranked next to that of the Incarnate Word.

Ah! how truly could Mary say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the meek, blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice." * Was she not the preordained model of evangelical perfection? and, in teaching His doctrine, could not Jesus Christ point to His Most Holy Mother as exemplifying it in her practice, and say to the people, "Do according to the example given you, and you will fulfil the whole of the law." †

APPLICATION.

As often as we have the happiness to hear and read the Word of God, let us take care that it shall be with the dispositions required of us, and which are indispensable in order to work in our souls the fruits of divine grace. Let us listen to it religiously, as if coming from our Lord Himself. Let us lift up our hearts above all human sentiments through which we would see man, and not the representative of God, in the pastors of the Church.

Let us meditate on the Word of God with attention, respect, assiduity, and an earnest will. This is what all the saints have done, and, with their example before them, what all those souls do that have at heart their salvation and advancement in Christian perfection.

Let us live conformably to the maxims of the Holy Gospel, remembering that we ought to follow not only its precepts but also its counsels; that it is for this end that we have received the grace of our holy vocation. The Divine Master wishes that we should be His living Gospel, models that He can hold up to all those whom He calls to observe His law.

Let us pray for the success of the preaching of the Gospel and the spread of our holy religion. Let us beg of God

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* St. Matt. v. 3, 4, 6.

† See Ex. xxv. 40; St. Matt. vii. 12.

that, by His grace, the Word of Truth may enlighten every mind and take possession of every heart, and that every human being may profit by the superabundant redemption of Jesus Christ.

Let us do all we can within the sphere of our state of life to accomplish this end. Let it be a labor of love to impart religious instruction to all with whose education we are charged. Let nothing be dearer to our heart than to repeat to them the words of the Divine Master, to explain to them their meaning, and exhort them to put them in practice.

But let us not forget that, if we wish to persuade our pupils to make the Gospel the rule of their conduct, we must let them see and understand that we have, in reality, made it the rule of our own, and that to them we are, as it were, a personification of the holy doctrine it is our duty to teach them.

PRAYER.

Holy Mother of God, most prudent Virgin and Seat of wisdom, with what sublime dispositions you listened to the teaching of your Divine Son! Obtain for me the grace always to receive God's Holy Word with a lively faith, a holy respect, an entire submission, and the most firm resolution to practice what it commands.

Oh, that through your intercession I may be successful in causing it to be known, loved, and practiced by those who are under my charge, so that I may be able to accomplish some good during my pilgrimage on earth; and, when that shall have come to an end, I may be admitted to contemplate in heaven Him who is truth itself, and whose visible presence constitutes supreme happiness.

See *Résumés*, page 425.

28.—MARY AT THE MARRIAGE FEAST OF CANA.

There was a marriage in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.—ST. JOHN ii. 1.

CONSIDERATION.

AFTER thirty years of filial obedience, eminently glorious to His Blessed Mother, Jesus wishes to glorify her still more, and honor her divine maternity by His first miracle. Ah! let us impress this fact deeply on our minds, pregnant with instruction, and so well calculated to make us understand and admire the heart of Mary, and her all-powerful influence over that of Jesus!

"There was a marriage in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; and Jesus, also, was invited to the marriage with His disciples."* May we not infer, from these words of the Evangelist, that Jesus was present because Mary was there; that his divine Master, who has not yet publicly manifested His power, attended this marriage feast only that He might accompany His Most Holy Mother; that he was yet unknown to those who invited Him except as the Son of man, and not as the Son of God?

However this may be, how happy are those spouses who are honored with the presence of Jesus and Mary among their guests! Happy is that company of which the Holy of Holies and His divine Mother form a part: what blessings will they not bring down upon those who compose it!

The wine failing during the feast, the spouses begin to feel a mortifying humiliation; but the Most Blessed Mother, in her watchful solicitude, at once perceived their painful embarrassment, and her tender heart was filled with compassion and sympathy.

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* St. John ii. 1, 2.

"How, in truth," says St. Bernard, "could the Mother of Jesus have failed to be moved with compassion and sympathy? Is not Jesus mercy itself; and could it be that the Holy Virgin, from whom He received life, should not abound in mercy and goodness."

Neither could it be that Mary's compassion should be fruitless; it proceeded from charity, and charity is not satisfied with merely expressing pity for the sufferings of another. It seeks the best means to alleviate them, and it is ever as ingenious in discovering those means as it is zealous in applying them. Hence, Mary proposes to come to their aid, and, to this end, to have recourse to the omnipotence of her divine Son, feeling confident that He will not refuse her request. Turning towards Him, she says: "They have no wine." *

Let us observe that Mary does not express the immediate object of her request, but satisfies herself with making known the wants of those for whom her compassion is awakened. Ah! it is because she understands the heart of Jesus; because she knows that that adorable heart is a fountain of mercy; that His will to do us good is stronger than our desire that He should help us; that to give Him the opportunity to exhibit his liberality towards us is to please and delight Him.

Meanwhile, Jesus seems, to refuse the request implied in Mary's words. "Woman," he replies, "what is that to me and to thee? My hour is not yet come." † These words which have come down to us stripped of the tone in which they were uttered, and which might have greatly modified their apparent import, strike us as harsh; but, even in that aspect, they convey to us a precious lesson, and contribute to the glory of the Most Holy Virgin.

On the point of entering upon that career of miracles which was to close only with that of His resurrection, Jesus

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* St. John ii. 3. † St. John ii. 4.

teaches men that He is acting as the Son of the Eternal Father, and with purposes of a divine and supernatural order, and not merely as the Son of Mary, and from motives purely natural. "The Saviour," says St. Ambrose, "does not intimate that He will refuse compliance with the request of His Most Holy Mother, but that He must subordinate it to the ministry with which His heavenly Father has charged Him." "After having informed Mary," as St. Chrysostom teaches, "that His hour was not yet come, He will not fail to obey her, that it may be seen, on the one hand, that all His moments were regulated and pre-engaged, and, on the other, what tenderness and deference He had for His Mother.

Yes, Jesus will obey Mary, whose prayers remove every obstacle and surmount every difficulty. To gratify her, He will work His first miracle, and thus reveal to all that her intercession with Him will triumph over every difficulty; that if there is a decree according to which the hour of His first miracle is not yet come, that decree is subordinate to another by virtue of which He can refuse nothing to His divine Mother.

But, whatever may have been the trial to which the Most Blessed Virgin is subjected, on this occasion, her confidence is unchanged, and she acts as though she were certain of having been heard. She merely indicated a wish, and she reads in the heart of her Son that it will be gratified. Even the answer of the Saviour confirms her hope: she learns from it that, since He has spoken as God, He wishes to act as God. "If the answer of the Son," says St. Bernard, "seemed harsh and severe, it was because He knew her whom He addressed, and she was not ignorant of Him who spoke. But that we may have no doubt in regard to her interpretation of His answer, or of her confidence in His willingness to gratify her, she says to the waiters: "Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye." *

The waiters give special attention to the orders of Jesus,

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* St. John ii. 5.

and execute them with promptness. They fill to the brim the water-pots which were there, "according to the manner of the purifying of the Jews." * These preparations being made, the Divine Master manifests His omnipotence, and changes the water into wine. He thus reveals His divinity, and confirms in their faith the disciples who were with Him.

Oh, what joy Mary experienced! The day of great mercies has come at last; the clouds which enveloped the Divine Sun are dispelled; Nature, seeing her laws reversed, proclaims that she obeys a sovereign power; the disciples of Jesus are strengthened in their conviction that their Master is, indeed, the Messiah, the Son of God, are more zealous in proclaiming His Holy Name, and more resolute in devoting themselves to Him and laboring for the establishment of His holy religion.

The Most Holy Virgin foresees the effects of the life of miracles upon which her adorable Son has just entered, and by which so many nations will be brought in subjection to the faith of the Gospel. In her prophetic vision, she beholds the Church spreading over the earth, and passing down from age to age, until it finally participates in the eternal marriage-feast of the Lamb.

APPLICATION.

Let us honor Mary, who is all-powerful with Jesus; let us glorify her for the ministry of grace she fulfils, and which consists in laying before her Divine Son all our necessities, and in inducing Him to provide for them. Let us praise her for her goodness, her compassion for all who are in affliction, and her eagerness to assist them. In imitation of her, let us compassionate the afflictions of others, lay before our Divine Lord the wants of our souls, and particularly of those with whom we may happen to be associated. Alas! how many there are of this latter class of whom it could be said: They have no wine of holy fervor, of generous devotion to the service of God.

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* St. John ii. 6.

Let us pray for them, and also for ourselves, who may be, perhaps, in the deplorable state of spiritual languor. To this end, let us have recourse to the mediation of Mary, beseeching her to lay before her Son the wants and poverty of our poor souls, and entreat Him to show us mercy and favor.

Let us place our entire confidence in her. "Let us feel assured," says St. Bernard, "that, yielding to our pious importunities, this Mother of Mercies will not refuse to come to our assistance. Ah! since she took pity on those who invited her to the marriage-feast without even waiting to be asked, with what confidence may we not look up to her when we fervently invoke her compassion?"

Let us endeavor to render ourselves worthy of her protection, and, with that purpose in view, always keep before our minds the excellent advice of St. Francis de Sales: "The Holy Virgin is all-powerful with her Divine Son. Have recourse to her — invoke her; but if you desire her protection, obey that command: 'Whatsoever my Son shall say to you, do ye.'"

PRAYER.

O Mary, my good Mother, remember your goodness and how all-powerful your intercession is with your Divine Son; vouchsafe to take pity on me. See the wants of my soul and lay them before Jesus. Tell Him that I have no fervor, charity, humility, courage, or zeal, and implore Him to work a new miracle in me by imparting to me these admirable virtues.

I will praise you in time, O Mother of Mercy, but, above all, in eternity, where, through your intercession, I hope one day to celebrate the nuptials of your adorable Son with His Church triumphant and glorious.

See *Résumés*, page 425.

29.—MARY DURING THE PUBLIC LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Thy Mother and Thy brethren stand without seeking thee. — St. Matt. xii. 47.

CONSIDERATION.

MARY, whose Most Holy Heart breathed only for the love of God and the salvation of souls, was, above everything else, deeply interested in the preaching of the Gospel. Her sweetest joy was to see it propagated throughout Galilee and Judea, whence it was afterward to spread throughout the world, while she grieved in her inmost soul at the blind incredulity of the Jews, whose opposition to Jesus Christ was already accomplishing that prophecy of the old Simeon: "This child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted." * Truly, this was a sword that pierced her soul.

Whenever it was possible, she accompanied the Divine Saviour in preaching the Gospel, but with unostentatious modesty. She shrank from public observation and was lost in the crowd. After having reared Him as a man, she is now wholly occupied in silently admiring Him as a God, and in cherishing in her heart the recollection of all He had done.

It entered into the designs of that adorable Master that His Most Holy Mother should thus, as it were, separate herself from Him; for by this He wished to teach men that He was about to inaugurate a new order of priesthood

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* St. Luke ii. 34.

that should know neither tribe, nor race, nor family, looking up only to God; that He was creating an apostolate that was to be detached from all the ties of nature, in order that it might exercise its functions with entire freedom, and produce the most abundant fruits.

Thus, the Evangelists speak but little of Mary during the public life of her Divine Son, and, in what they say of her, they seem to assign her a secondary rank, while, in truth, they invariably and unceasingly exalt her and hold her up as the object of our veneration.

Let us here recall and meditate on what they say in reference to the Most Blessed Virgin. When Jesus Christ delivered a man possessed of a devil, and His enemies, being unable to deny the miracle, cried out, He casteth out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of devils, "a certain woman in the crowd, lifting up her voice, said to Him: Blessed is the womb that bore thee and the paps that gave thee suck."* She thus blesses her to whom, thirty years before, Elizabeth said, "Blessed art thou that hast believed."† And here we find a fulfilment of those words of the Divine Mother of the Redeemer: "All generations shall call me blessed,"‡ while it is also a prelude to the praises which the Church shall decree to her, repeating under a thousand forms, and proclaiming to the end of time, "Blessed art thou, O Holy Virgin! for thou hast brought forth the King who rules heaven and earth throughout the everlasting ages." §

Instead of the beatification of Mary pronounced by the woman in the crowd, Jesus, however, substitutes another, which, while it equally applies to the Most Blessed Virgin, is also applicable to all who are truly faithful: "Yea, rather," said He, "blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it."‖ Ah! who can fail to perceive here that, while seeming to overlook His Most Holy Mother,

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* St. Luke xi. 27. † St. Luke i. 45. ‡ St. Luke i. 48.

§ Introit: Salve, Sancta Parens. ‖ St. Luke xi. 28.

He, in reality, assigns her the very first rank, since to the eulogy of her divine maternity He adds that of the virtues which render her worthy of that singular and incomparable prerogative?

For who, in truth, has so perfectly heard and kept the word of God as the faithful Virgin whom the angel saluted as full of grace, whom Elizabeth congratulated on her faith, who had received in her soul the Word of God before conceiving Him in her chaste womb, and who has ever been the most perfect model of the observance of the Evangelical counsels.

Yes, Holy Virgin, you are blessed because you are the mother of Him who has come down to us in order that He may raise us up to Him; and you are still more blessed in having merited so high an honor by your sublime virtues. Oh! how sweet it is to us to unite with that woman who raised her voice in the midst of the crowd in calling you blessed, or, rather, with the whole Church, which unceasingly proclaims your praise and celebrates your greatness!

But while Jesus was yet speaking to the multitude, "one said to Him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without seeking thee. But He, answering him that told Him, said, Who is my mother and who are my brethren? And stretching forth His hands toward His disciples, He said, Behold my mother and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father that is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother." *

Ah! here, as in the preceding passage, human reason is silent, because, with its limited powers, it cannot grasp the extent and meaning of the words of Infinite wisdom. Faith alone can explain them, as, indeed, it has explained them, and in a manner no less instructive to us than glorious to Mary.

The Jews, when speaking to Jesus Christ of His Mother

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* St. Matt. xii. 47–50.

and of His other relations, regarded Him only as an ordinary man, and it was for the purpose of dispelling their error that He reminded them of His heavenly Father. He teaches them, moreover, that there should exist between men and Him a spiritual relationship more excellent than that of consanguinity; "that the connection we have with Him, through the Holy Ghost, surpasses that of flesh and blood, and that thus the greatest glory to which we can be raised is that which flows from the practice of virtue." * He wishes also to teach, by His own example, those whom He has destined to be his disciples, that they must sacrifice all earthly ties for God and the accomplishment of His holy will.

Let us consider that, even while appearing to slight His Most Holy Mother, He, in reality, passes upon her the most glorious eulogium. He applies to those who do the will of His heavenly Father the names of mother, sisters and brethren. Now who was there that could compare with Mary in doing the will of His heavenly Father? Was she not that well-beloved daughter of the Father whom, from the first moment of her existence, she glorified by her disposition of submission and obedience, surpassing that of the heavenly hosts, and which she never ceased to develop with ever-increasing perfection? Did she not perform, with the most entire fidelity, not only all that was directly required of her on the part of the Lord, but everything she was counselled to do by those whom she regarded as His representatives? Ah! if the maternity by which she gave birth to the divine Redeemer was her supreme privilege, could she not also claim, in the most sublime degree, that spiritual maternity of which Jesus had just spoken?

Yes, Mary, you are twice the Mother of Jesus; first by the miracle of the Incarnation in which you co-operated; and, secondly, by the most perfect imitation of His virtues,

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* St. Chrysostom.

Therefore, in exalting those who imitate Him in doing the will of His Father, your divine Son raises you above men and angels, and crowns you with a glory surpassing in splendor all that has ever been given to the purest of creatures.

APPLICATION.

Let us celebrate the greatness of Mary. Let us, in a special manner, congratulate her on her divine maternity, and particularly on those sublime virtues by which she merited so great a privilege. Like her, let us devote ourselves to the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Let us fervently pray for the propagation of the Gospel, and contribute to so glorious an end by doing, within the sphere of duties which our state of life prescribes, all the good we can. Let us know how to withdraw ourselves from the applause of men; let us labor for their welfare, but without ostentation. It will be sufficient for us that God sees the good that our charity and zeal inspire us to accomplish.

Let us listen, with attention and piety, to His holy word which is communicated to us in so many different ways. Let us receive it with faith, love, docility, and gratitude. Especially let us practice it with that fidelity which becomes those who, in embracing a religious life, have renounced their own will to do, at all times and in all things, the will of their Father who is in Heaven.

PRAYER.

Who am I that dare to celebrate your greatness, O Mary? What can a poor sinner do to honor you, O Most Holy Mother of God. I will try, nevertheless, and cry aloud: Blessed art thou, O Holy Virgin, Queen of Heaven and earth, Mother of the Sovereign King, woman blessed among women. Thou art even greater by thy virtues than by thy prerogatives, and thus art truly worthy of all praise, everywhere and at all times.

Vouchsafe to remember that thou art my protectress, and obtain for me the grace fully to understand what thy divine Son has said, and faithfully to cherish it to the hour of my death. Amen.

See *Résumés*, page 426.

30.—COMPASSION OF THE MOST HOLY VIRGIN.

My life is wasted with grief and my years in sighs. — Ps. xxx. 11.

CONSIDERATION.

PLEASURE having brought sin into the world, its expiation must be by suffering; and as Eve was united with Adam in the disobedience which caused the ruin of the human race, so should Mary, the new Eve, be united with Jesus Christ, the new Adam, in the sacrifice by which He was to atone for sin and restore man to the state from which he had fallen.

Mother of Jesus, it could not be otherwise than that she would compassionate in the very depths of her soul all the humiliations, privations, and tortures He was to undergo; predestined to be His most perfect image, it was necessary that she should participate more than all others in the chalice of His passion; Model of all virtues, it was necessary that she should be tried by the severest tribulations, in order that all might know the heroism of her courage, her patience, and her entire submission to the will of the Most High; Mother of the faithful and representative of the Church, it was necessary that she should compassionate, in the name of the Church, all the sufferings of the Man-God, as a spouse does those of her spouse.

No pure creature has, therefore, suffered so much; and it is for this reason that the Church applies to her those words of the prophet Jeremias: "To what shall I compare thee, or to what shall I liken thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? to what shall I equal thee, that I may comfort thee, O Virgin daughter of Sion? for great as the sea is thy destruction." *

The saints who suffered martyrdom found in their love for Jesus an alleviation of their tortures; but it was different with Mary. The more she loved, the greater share she had in His sufferings, the more acutely she felt His tortures; and hence the intensity of her sufferings can be measured only by the depth of her love. In her was realized that prophecy of Isaias: "He will crown thee with a crown of tribulation;" † for, as the Doctors of the Church say, she suffered more than all the martyrs together, and has, therefore, every claim to the title of "Queen of Martyrs," which the Church has decreed to her.

Truly might she say with David, "My life is wasted with grief and my years in sighs." From the moment of the incarnation of the Word, she experienced in her heart the most agonizing sorrows, "because," says St. Liguori, "by the light with which she was illumined from on high she understood the passages of the Holy Scripture that referred to the Messiah, and she foresaw the deluge of evils which was to overwhelm the "Just One who bore the iniquities of all." Already she beheld Him betrayed by one of His own,‡ sold for thirty pieces of silver,§ abandoned by His disciples,‖ insulted, mocked, spat upon, scourged, lacerated, rendered unrecognizable, and like a leper ¶ condemned to the most shameful death,** thus bearing alone the curse pronounced against all." ††

These thoughts were a subject of living agony to the Most Blessed Mother, and it was for this reason the Abbé

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* Lament. ii. 13. † Isaias xxii. 18. ‡ Ps. xl. 10.

§ Zach. xi. 12. ‖ Ibid. xiii. 7, Job xix. 14. ¶ Isaiah liii. 4.

** Wisdom ii. 20. †† See Isaias lxiii. 3.

Rupert makes her address us thus: "Souls whom Jesus has saved, do not stop to consider only the last hour in which I saw my Son expire on the cross; when I carried Him in my arms, when I pressed Him to my bosom, my mind represented Him to me on the tree of His sacrifice, and I participated in advance in all the agonies of His passion."

To this perspective of agonies were added afflictions of every degree that rendered the life of this Divine Mother an uninterrupted series of tribulations. How must she have suffered at Bethlehem, when, repulsed by every one, she sought shelter in a stable, the only asylum that was open to the poverty of the august Virgin! How must her heart have been wrung with anguish on beholding the extreme destitution of the new-born Jesus! Oh! what tears did she shed while wrapping in swaddling-clothes the infant God, and laying Him in a crib on a pallet of straw!

And yet this is but one feature of the sad picture that becomes darker and darker as we proceed from the manger. Ah! let us bring before our minds the circumcision of the Divine Saviour; His presentation in the temple; the prophecy of the old man Simeon; the flight into Egypt, and the long sojourn of the Holy Family in that land of bondage; the loss of the child Jesus during the Feast of the Passover; the death of St. Joseph; the opposition of the Sadducees and Pharisees to the spread of the Gospel—were not all these sources of the most inconceivable agony to the heart of Mary?

Again, let us recall to mind the mysteries of the Passion in which Mary bore so great a share. Jesus Christ said to His disciples, "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things shall be accomplished which were written by the prophets concerning the Son of man. For He shall be delivered to the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and scourged, and spit upon." *

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* St. Luke xviii. 31, 32.

Mary is informed of these words by which her divine Son announces that the hour of the great sacrifice was at hand, and she accompanies Him to Jerusalem that she may share in His sufferings.

And oh! what inconceivable agonies await her there! How must her pure soul have been wrung with agony, on that sad night when she learned, successively, of the sadness unto death in the garden of olives, of the treason of Judas, of the flight of all the other apostles, of the appearance of Jesus before the tribunals of Annas and Caiaphas, the insults with which He was loaded, the sentence of the national council adjudging Him worthy of death, and delivering Him over to Pilate. Well has St. Bonaventure said: "Sleep, O Mary, has not touched your eyelids, and you have kept watch in your tears."

But now comes the day of Mary's supreme desolation. Ah! who can fathom her sorrows on learning, and even on beholding, the scenes in Pilate's judgment-hall, or in the palace of Herod; on seeing her adorable Son calumniated, insulted, mocked as a fool, the robber Barabbas preferred to Him, scourged, crowned with thorns, condemned to a most cruel death! . . .

O Mary, you are indeed the Mother of Sorrows! Ah! but you are also the co-operatrix in the work of our redemption. Therefore it is that, subduing the tortures that agonize your heart, you will place yourself on the way that Jesus is to pass; you will gaze upon him under the weight of His cross; after Him you will ascend Mount Calvary, adoring and watering with your tears the traces of His footsteps; you will be present at His crucifixion, and place yourself near the altar of His sacrifice. And there you will remain, suppressing the anguish of your soul, subduing your immense grief, making yourself an involuntary associate in that bloody immolation; and all this, O heart-stricken Mother, for us, for so great is your charity that we can apply to you the words referred to the heavenly Father: "You so loved the world as to give up your only begotten Son for its salvation." *

APPLICATION.

"To ransom the slave," says St. Bernard, "the Eternal Father and Mary sacrificed their common Son." What rank, then, does the august Virgin hold in the great work of redemption, and what claims does she possess on our gratitude and love? "Let us bless her for the voluntary martyrdom to which she submitted,"† and which has been a fountain of so many graces to us. Let us compassionate her sufferings, and, remembering that these sufferings were caused by our sins, let us sincerely deplore those we have committed and firmly resolve to sin no more.

Like our good Mother, let us share in the sufferings and ignominies which Jesus endured for us, and strive to imitate His patience, His resignation, and His charity. Let us keep alive, in our hearts and souls, the remembrance of His passion, and endeavor to conform ourselves to that adorable model. Let us ascend the rugged heights of Calvary with Him, bearing our cross, weeping for our sins, adoring the divine Justice, and submitting to its chastisement. Let us offer ourselves as victims with Him in order that through Him we may glorify His heavenly Father, and thus enjoy a superabundant share in the merits of His sacrifice.

PRAYER.

O Mary, Queen of Martyrs and fountain of love, grant that I may feel the weight of thy sorrows, and that I may weep with thee. Share with me the agonies which Jesus endured for me.‡

Ah! let me supplicate thee, by the agonies with which thy soul was rent during the passion of the Saviour, vouch-

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* St. John iii. 16. † Albertus Magnus. ‡ Stabat-Mater.

safe to obtain for me sincere repentance of my sins, which, alas! were the cause of His sufferings and of yours, as well as the fortitude to bear after Him, and with holy dispositions, the cross it is His blessed will I should carry, so that, being united with Him in His sacrifice, I may obtain its blessed fruits in time and eternity.

See *Résumés*, page 426.

31.—MARY ON MOUNT CALVARY.

O Virgin daughter of Sion; for great as the sea is thy destruction.—LAMENT. ii. 13.

CONSIDERATION.

LOVE for Jesus is not measured by the consolations which He pours into our souls, but by the share that we voluntarily take in His sufferings; and as no creature ever loved Jesus so much as Mary, so no one could share in the same degree in His bitter chalice. "She was a martyr," says St. Bernard, "not by the sword of the executioner, but by the agony of her heart; for she suffered in the Passion of the Saviour tortures capable of causing death not once, but a hundred times." "The sacrifice of the martyrs," adds St. Antoninus, "was limited to their own self-offering, while the august Virgin sacrificed the life of her Son, which was infinitely dearer to her than her own." She was not on Mount Thabor, but she will soon be on Mount Calvary, where she can say in those words of Job which the Church applies to her: "My sorrow hath oppressed me, my face is swollen with weeping, and my eyelids are dim." *

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* Office of our Lady's seven dolors. Job xvi. 8-17.

So soon as she learned that Jesus was condemned to die, she placed herself on the road over which He was to pass. Soon He comes up, carrying His cross and surrounded by His executioners. O God! what a spectacle for the most loving of mothers to behold! She fixes her eyes, filled with tears, on the Divine Saviour, who returns her gaze of compassion, and, by this reciprocal look, their hearts reveal to each other their mutual feelings of compassion, suffering, and love.

But the executioners hurry the steps of Jesus, and Mary is no longer able to behold Him. What will she do? It might seem that she ought to return to the interior of her dwelling, and let her tears flow unchecked. Mothers do not witness the execution of their sons. No; but Mary is not an ordinary mother. In her the order of nature is entirely subordinate to that of grace, under the inspiration of which she must be present at the immolation of the Divine Redeemer.

She therefore ascends the hill of sacrifice, treading, the first among the faithful, the path of sorrows, henceforth to be called "the way of the cross," uniting herself in mind and soul with Jesus, the Victim; adoring the traces of divine blood which everywhere mark His steps. She reaches the place of execution. Ah! who can conceive the deep anguish of her soul on witnessing the terrible scene which at that moment met her eyes? The executioners are stripping Jesus; they stretch Him on the bed of ignominy and torture prepared for Him; the blows of the hammer resound in the midst of a silence of horror. . . . Oh! how sadly they re-echo in the heart of Mary! How their reverberation crushes her soul!

But now the cross is raised, and she beholds her Divine Son suspended by the cruel nails between heaven and earth. Oh! why does she not sink to the earth under this accumulating burden of inexpressible sorrows? . . . No, Mary will not give way; though her desolation is deep as the sea, her courage is high as the heavens. Behold her drawing nearer to the cross as the crowd retires, and there taking her position in the attitude of a priest at the altar. What function does she here fulfil? Through her love for us she gives her consent to the death of Jesus. As the representative of the whole Church, she offers to God the victim of holocaust and expiation, and asks that the whole world may share in the fruits of this great sacrifice of salvation.

O abnegation! O charity! O generosity! And yet, O Divine Mother, at that supreme moment when, with so much reality and truth, you could say, "Oh, all you that pass by the way, attend, and see if there is sorrow like unto my sorrow," * — at that moment of unutterable agony you think of us, you pray for us, unworthy sinners; and to obtain mercy for us you offer up to heaven the sufferings of the adorable Victim, with whom you say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." †

"Inflamed with charity, the august Virgin," says St. Liguori, "burned to die for us with her Divine Son. She loves us so much that, during the three hours she stood at the foot of the cross, she did not cease for a moment to sacrifice Him in her heart."

But while Mary thus gives us Jesus in consenting to His death, Jesus gives us Mary, and appoints her our Mother. As the great work of our redemption was about being consummated, He completed the testament which He had already made in our favor at the last supper, and bequeathed to us the greatest legacy He could leave to us after His own adorable body. Looking at the august Virgin, and designating St. John to her, He said, "Woman, behold thy Son;" then turning His eyes toward His disciple, who represented all the faithful, He said, "Behold thy mother."

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* Lament. i. 12.

† St. Luke xxiii. 34; St. John xix. 26, 27.

Jesus spoke as God, and His word accomplishes all it signifies; from that moment, therefore, Mary is the mother of all Christians as well as of the well-beloved disciple.

Ah! let us always keep before our minds the circumstances in which she gives us birth to the life of grace, and what abundant reason we have to call ourselves the children of her sorrows!

Soon after, Jesus said, "All is consummated; and bowing His head, He gave up the ghost." * . . . Yes, all is over; the sacrifice is consummated; heavenly justice is satisfied, and divine mercy will henceforth reign upon the earth.

But with what sentiments is the heart of Mary penetrated while she contemplates the body of her Divine Son hanging on the cross, His face bathed in blood, His countenance pale, covered with wounds from head to foot! What anguish does she experience when she sees a soldier pierce the side of the adorable Victim with a lance, open His breast, and penetrate His divine heart! . . . Yes, O Divine Mother, it is now that we see the prophecy of the aged Simeon fulfilled: "Thy own soul a sword shall pierce!" †

But now you assist at the taking down from the cross, and I see you, O Mother of sorrow, receive in your arms and place on your knees the body of your Divine Son, gaze upon each one of His sacred wounds, kiss them with the most profound veneration, wash them with your tears, then, raising your eyes to heaven, give expression to your incomparable desolation, and supplicate the Heavenly Father in our behalf, in the name of that Divine Victim who has just been immolated, and through whom we may ask and obtain mercy.

APPLICATION.

Let us honor Mary in her compassion, saluting her as "Queen of Martyrs," and associating ourselves with her in

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* St. John xix. 30. † St. Luke ii. 35.

her sorrows. Like her, let us contemplate Jesus immolating Himself for fallen man; let us weep over the sufferings which overwhelm Him; let us take part in His bitter chalice. Let us excite in our soul a horror of sin, which was the true cause of His suffering and death; let us lament those we have committed, and make atonement by penance and prayer.

When we are present at the august sacrifice of the Mass, which is the renewal of that of Calvary, let us unite in heart and soul with Mary at the foot of the cross; let us adore God through the victim that is offered on our altars; let us implore Him, with confidence and fervor, to have mercy upon us, upon our neighbor, and upon the suffering souls in Purgatory.

Let us meditate frequently on the sorrows of Mary, reflecting on the motives of charity and love for us which inflamed her soul, and on the virtues of which she is the model. The wise man has said, "Forget not the groanings of thy Mother." * Ah! let us hearken to that precept. Let us remember how much our good Mother suffered that she might co-operate in our redemption, and measure, as well as we can, the fathomless depths of her sorrow. Let us do so especially in our hours of trial. When disheartening thoughts arise in our soul, let us recall Mary at the foot of the cross; let us behold her maternal heart pierced and transfixed with the sword of grief, and let us ask ourselves if, professing to be her children, we should not bear some share in her sufferings; if we must not weep with her on earth, if we desire to rejoice with her in the kingdom of everlasting glory.

PRAYER.

O Mary, Queen of Martyrs, I weep over your sorrows which are infinite, and I weep over myself who have been

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* Eccles. vii. 29.

their cause. Yes, I look at Jesus on the cross and say: This is my work; it is my sins that have covered my Saviour with wounds, that have crowned Him with thorns, that have pierced His hands and feet. O compassionate and most loving Virgin, cast upon me a look of pity, and, through the merits of the sacrifice offered up on Calvary, and in which you so generously co-operated, obtain for me the pardon of my sins, a sincere resolution never more to commit sin, and the grace of final perseverance, so that I may glorify in Heaven the Lamb who has redeemed us with His most precious blood.

See *Résumés*, page 427.

32.—MARY AT THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST.

Thy comforts have given joy to my soul.—Ps. xciii. 19.

CONSIDERATION.

ASSOCIATED with Jesus Christ in the work of our redemption, the Most Holy Virgin drank to the very dregs the chalice of humiliation and sorrow. For long, long hours, her heart had been crushed and broken with affliction and agony; she was present at the crucifixion; she witnessed the agony and death of her adorable Son; she assisted at the descent from the cross, and the burial of His sacred body. Now she withdraws from the theatre of so much suffering, and, her tears still flowing, descends the mountain of the great sacrifice.

She passes the Sabbath in retirement, silence and sorrow, recalling the scenes of the Passion, transporting herself in thought to the hill of Calvary, or near the tomb in which the Author of the new creation rests, on this seventh day of the great week.

But she calmly reposes on hope, for she knows that Jesus has said: "The Son of man will rise on the third day," * and her faith inspires her with absolute certainty that the words of her divine Son will be literally fulfilled. She, therefore, awaits that third day with entire confidence—that day which shall be the First of days, which through all coming ages shall be esteemed the day *par excellence*, to which none other shall be compared.

At the appointed time Jesus releases Himself from the arms of death, and comes forth from the sepulchre, thus triumphing over His enemies, and filling with unspeakable joy His Most Holy Mother and His disciples.

The gospel does not make mention of any appearance of Jesus to Mary, because it records, in a special manner, only those that were intended to convince the disciples, and, through them, the entire Church; and besides, Mary was as much convinced, by her faith alone, as the disciples were by the vision of their divine Master, conversing and eating with them. But a pious tradition, the general opinion of the saints, and special revelations, particularly those made to St. Bridget, do not permit us to doubt that our Lord, after His resurrection, appeared to her to reward her for her faith, her love and compassion, and to make her joy equal to all her past sorrows.

Let us contemplate her, then, repairing to the sepulchre, at early dawn, on the first day of the week, her thoughts occupied with the scenes of but two days before, of which everything she sees so sadly reminds her. Suddenly Jesus appears before her, resplendent in beauty, and says: "Peace to you, O my Mother!"

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* St. Matth. xvii. 22; xx. 19; St. Mark ix. 30; x. 34; St. Luke xviii. 33.

"Oh, who," says the Pere de Grenada, "can express the transports of her soul! As she felt more acutely than any other the sorrows of the Passion, so she shares more than any other in the joy of the resurrection. Imagine if you can the emotions of her soul when she sees her Son living, glorious, surrounded by saints whom He had raised from the dead, and who compose His court."

What a shock! What intoxication of happiness! Yes, without a miracle, Mary would have died of joy. What! That dearly beloved Son whom, but three days ago, she beheld bleeding, disfigured, covered with wounds, dead upon the cross, then buried; — she sees Him before her eyes; she hears His voice; — she can press Him in her arms, clasp Him to her heart! . . . . He shows Himself to her full of strength, grace, and glory. He has risen again by His own power; He has burst, with His own omnipotent hands, the bonds of death, and He is henceforth impassible. . . . .

Ah! how much reason have we here to exclaim, in the language of the Church: "Rejoice, Queen of Heaven, because He whom thou didst deserve to bear has risen again as He said." * Mary did, in truth, rejoice on seeing Jesus risen from the dead, as much as she was desolate with grief at the sight of His agony and death. She had seen her divine Son stricken by death, and now He appears to her the conqueror of death, which He holds in chains under His feet, and to which He says: "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" †

She sees the adorable flesh of her Son glorified, not only exempt from the corruption of the grave, but coming forth from it shining with celestial splendor; and this glory is reflected on herself, for the flesh of Jesus, as St. Augustine says, is, in one sense, the flesh of Mary. She knows that, by anticipation, she has risen again in Jesus, the new

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* Ant. Regina Celi. † 1 Cor. xv. 55.

Adam, the head of humanity, who, destroying the power of death, snatches from its ghastly embrace all who are united in Him.

Forgetful of herself, Mary rejoices in all that the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus Christ has done for the glory of God, the establishment of the Church, and the sanctification of souls.

She understands that this miracle, prefigured by Joseph coming forth from prison; by Samson from the city of Gaza; by Daniel, from the lion's den; by Jonas, from the whale's belly, and which Jesus Christ had presented to the Jews as the sign that would be given to them of His divinity, is the foundation of the Christian's belief; that it confirms the truth of all that the Saviour has taught, and that it will prove a new life to the nations, plunged in the darkness of error, who shall be called to the faith of the gospel.

She understands what a victory it is over the devil, who, "a murderer from the beginning," * is the original author of death. Ah! it is at this glorious moment she feels that she has crushed the head of the malignant serpent.

She adores in Jesus risen again the conqueror of the powers of darkness. She blesses Him in His triumph, which she knows will be celebrated throughout all coming ages. She sees in Him humanity rising again from the grave, as will be the case at the end of the world. By the light of faith her eyes already behold all men who now repose, or shall hereafter repose, in the grave, rising from their ashes, divesting themselves of the winding-sheets which envelop them, and presenting themselves at the feet of Him who is "the first-born from the dead." † She sees in Jesus arisen the company of the elect, who, in body and soul, shall adore and bless the triumphant Lamb in the heavenly Jerusalem.

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* St. John viii. 44. † Col. i. 18; Apoc. i. 5.

APPLICATION.

Let us celebrate with Mary the new Passover. Let us rejoice in the resurrection of the Saviour and in the fruits of salvation which flow from this glorious mystery. Let us renew within us the hope of our own resurrection already commenced in our Divine Head. Let us say, with the most profound sentiments of faith, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that I shall rise again at the last day." *

Let us renew our fervor and our zeal, so that we may participate ourselves, and be the means of others participating, in the life of Jesus Christ risen from the dead, "which," says St. Paul, "ought to manifest itself even in our mortal flesh." †

We say to Mary, "Rejoice, because your Son is risen again;" ‡ but we should not forget that the joy of which we remind her, by those words, is renewed on the conversion of every sinner. Ah! let us, then, procure for her this ineffable joy; and if, unfortunately, we are in a state of sin, let us hasten to arise from that sleep of death and cast away the winding-sheet of our iniquities.

Let us also, as far as we can, give her equal cause to rejoice at the conversion of our neighbor. Ah! let us never tire in our efforts, by prayer, good example, Christian instruction and conversation, to withdraw souls from sin, and the occasion of sin; to the practice of the duties of holy religion, which is our only true life here below, while waiting until it shall be transformed into life eternal.

PRAYER.

With what transports, O Mary, do I celebrate your happiness at the resurrection of your Divine Son, my Chief and my Model! O grant that, through your powerful protection, I may rise again with Him, and thus be to you, in a certain degree, a source of like happiness.

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* Job xix. 25. † 2 Cor. iv. 10, 11. ‡ Gaude et Letare.

Yes, my tender Mother, I conjure you, by the joy of your soul on beholding Jesus victorious over death, obtain for me, by your intercession, the grace of leading a virtuous and holy life, until, transplanted into the life of glory, it shall bestow on me the right to join the choirs of angels and saints in heaven, singing, "Rejoice, O Queen of Heaven, for He whom thou didst merit to bear in thy womb is risen again, according to His word."

See *Résumés*, page 427.

33.—MARY AT THE ASCENSION OF JESUS CHRIST.

And the Lord Jesus. . . . was taken up into Heaven.—St. Mark xvi. 19.

CONSIDERATION.

LET us contemplate the apostles and disciples assembled on the Mount of Olives to witness the last appearance of Jesus after His Resurrection and His glorious Ascension; and let us behold in their midst, as a pious tradition informs us, His Most Holy Mother participating in this supreme triumph.

The Divine Saviour appeared before, and filled with joy that assemblage so dear to Him, which, in truth, is no other than the Church itself. Oh! with what tender love He looks upon Mary who adores Him, prostrate at His feet, and kissing the marks of His sacred wounds. With what tenderness of expression and outpouring of the heart, He addresses His farewell words to her, as well as to His disciples, to whom He imparts His last instructions.

But the moment of separation has come. They see Him rise from the earth while blessing them, and soon disappear in a cloud, from which they seemed to be unable to withdraw their eyes.

Ah! what must be the emotions that fill the heart of Mary, who, at the moment when her Son is about to leave her to return to His Father, has so much reason to surrender her soul to transports of delight, while, at the same time, she must be profoundly afflicted.

This is, indeed, a mystery of joy for her: Jesus is triumphant: He ascends to Heaven through His own power, amid the acclamations of the angelic choirs that compose His glorious escort, and the hymns of joyful gratitude of all the just of the ancient law, who, with Him and through Him, enter into His glory. He exalts His humanity even more than it was humiliated during His Passion; He makes His triumphal car of that body which was fastened to the cross; He ennobles it so much as to make of it the sun of the New Jerusalem; He places in the very highest of the Heavens that flesh which He took from Mary, and which, in a certain sense, is the flesh of Mary.

The august Virgin understands that the ascension of Jesus Christ into Heaven is the opening of its gates, closed by the disobedience of Adam, to all who are found faithful. She beholds her divine Son, triumphant over sin, death, and hell, present Himself at the entrance of Paradise, disarm the Cherubim who guards its approach, and thus fulfil those words of the royal prophet: "Be ye lifted up, O Eternal Gates, and the King of Glory shall enter in." * She contemplates Him in the new Sion, received with acclamations of joy by the angelic hosts, and assigning to the souls of the just the places occupied by the rebel angels; and she blesses Him that He has been pleased "to raise up the needy from the earth. . . . that He may place them with princes, with the princes of His people." †

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* Ps. xxiii. 7, 8. † Ps. cxii. 7, 8.

And still it is to her, also, a mystery of sorrow. Her son, who alone is all her love and all her life, has just said adieu, and disappeared from her sight. Oh! how ardently she desired to follow Him! How distressing it is to her to remain a moment longer on earth, which she now looks upon as, in truth, the land of exile! . . . Yes, from this moment, all her thoughts, all her aspirations are centered in Heaven, and the sentiments which penetrate her soul incessantly find utterance in the words: "Heaven, where you reign, O my Son, is now my only ambition. When shall I be admitted there? When shall I enjoy your presence? Ah! why is my exile prolonged?*

After the ascension of Jesus Christ, and according to the instructions of that divine Master, the Most Holy Virgin and the disciples repaired to an upper room in Jerusalem that they might prepare themselves by prayer, meditation, and pious conversation, to receive the Holy Ghost, that Comforter so often promised, and who was, by His vivifying power, to renew the face of the earth.

Happy are the disciples of the Saviour, who thus pass ten days in the company of His Most Holy Mother? How her example and conversation excite and reanimate their fervor! How glorious is the retreat they make, possessing in their midst that treasure of every grace.

During their hours of retirement and prayer, Mary, it is most likely, informed the Apostles of what they were yet ignorant of, concerning the mystery of the Incarnation and those of the divine childhood, while, by her general conversation, she properly disposed them for that extraordinary favor which was about to be bestowed on them. She prayed for them and for all the faithful. If, at Cana, she asked for wine which was wanting at the marriage-feast, how much more fervently does she now ask, on behalf of the infant Church, or rather for the Church of all ages, for that delicious wine of divine love and all the other fruits of the Holy Ghost!

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* Ps. cxix. 5.

The Apostles united with her in prayer; they chose her as their advocate and their mediatrix, and she merited, by her prayers, that the Holy Ghost should be imparted to them with a plenitude of every grace.

The Holy Ghost descends in truth upon her and those who were with her in the upper room, and she receives Him in greater abundance than all the disciples together.

But does she not already possess Him? Was she not, from the moment of her Immaculate Conception, and especially from the very moment of the Incarnation of the Word, inundated with His light and consumed with His fires? Yes; but He wished to add to the gifts He had already bestowed on her. Spirit of love, He developed in her heart to an infinite degree love for those who were bequeathed to her, as children, on Mount Calvary. Ah! with what joy and confidence should not this inspire us? The Virgin Mother of God loves us with a love the most tender, the most affectionate, and the most devoted. . . . She loves us with the same love with which she loved her Divine Son who substituted us in His place, and no mortal, not even the greatest sinner, is excluded from her affections.

Blessed, then, be the heart of Mary, that Queen of greatness, that temple of the Holy Ghost, that mirror of the heart of Jesus. Yes, forever be it praised and extolled for its ineffable perfections, and for that love which it bears to us despite our unworthiness — a love which gives us an assurance that our good Mother interests herself in our behalf, with her Divine Son, and that we can thus, through her, obtain the divine clemency.

APPLICATION.

Let us honor Mary, so wonderfully endowed with the gifts of Heaven; let us celebrate the charity with which her heart is filled, and of which we are the special objects. Let us love that good Mother, but with a true love that will manifest itself in our purpose to do nothing but what will be agreeable to her, and to refrain from everything that would displease her. Let us strive to make our heart an image of her most holy heart. Let us enter with her into the spirit of the mysteries of our holy religion, and especially of those of the Ascension, and of the descent of the Holy Ghost.

Let us adore and bless Jesus Christ ascending into heaven, and raising there our nature, which, in His person, shall be placed at the right hand of the Father, above cherubim and seraphim. Let us remember that He has ascended to prepare for us a place there, and, during our pilgrimage in this life, let us aspire only to that happiness which is promised us in the next, faithfully observing that exhortation of St. Paul: "Seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God." *

Let us beseech the Holy Ghost to communicate to us His precious gifts which we absolutely need. Let us endeavor to merit that favor, and, to that end, let us remain with Mary in "the upper room"—that is, let us shun the world, observe silence, modesty, and recollection; let us devote to the most fervent and persevering prayer all the time that our rules consecrate to that important and salutary exercise; let us unite with Mary in fervent prayer, and let us also pray to Mary, remembering that whatever she asks God will not refuse.

Yes, let us faithfully observe these practices, and the Holy Ghost will descend upon us to dispel the darkness of our understanding, to warm our hearts with the fire of divine love, to impart to us his vivifying grace, whereby we may merit to be admitted into that abode of happiness where Jesus Christ and His Most Holy Mother forever reign.

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* Col. iii. 1.

PRAYER.

O Holy Virgin, Divine Mother of my Saviour, vouchsafe to present me to your Son, and entreat Him in my behalf. Obtain His blessing for me as He blessed His disciples when ascending into Heaven, and also that He may send down on me, as He did on them, His Holy Spirit, with an abundance of gifts, so that by grace I may reproduce in my heart that purity, sanctity, and love of which your heart possessed the complete fulness, and that I may finally reach the blessed abode of eternal light.

See *Résumés*, page 428.

34.—LAST YEARS OF MARY UPON EARTH.

Wo is me, that my sojourning is prolonged.—Ps. cxix. 5.

AFTER the ascension of her divine Son, it cannot be doubted that Mary's sojourn on earth was one of constraint, and that the most ardent aspirations of her soul were to be reunited to Him who alone constituted her happiness. But whatever may have been the ardor of her desires in this regard, she brought them into complete subjection to the will of God, and accepting, in this spirit, the prolongation of her exile, her constant study was to find out the designs of heaven, and to fulfil them with the most entire fidelity.

But these designs were that, above all else, she should exercise, on earth, those functions of mother with which she was invested on Mount Calvary, and which she was to continue to exercise in heaven; that she should remain with her adopted children to instruct, edify, console, and strengthen them; that she should, in some degree, supply the absence of her Son, and "that thus," as Saint Augustine says, "the Church militant might not be suddenly left an orphan, and stripped of visible help."

With what perfection does she correspond to the designs of God! As the bright morning star, she announced the rising of the Sun of justice, and now, as a luminous twilight, she still reflects His splendor, and illumines and rejoices the earth. The most perfect image of our Saviour, like Him, she passes her time in doing good, and in shedding around her consolation and peace; and, while awaiting the happy moment when it shall please Him to call her to Himself, she offers herself up as a holocaust of charity and love.

How much does she contribute in sustaining the zeal and confirming the courage of the Apostles, and in securing the fruits of their preaching! Her prayers return as fruitful showers to the earth, scattering and fertilizing the divine seed. How efficacious was her example in leading souls to the practice of the precepts and counsels of the gospel! What faithful follower of Christ could behold her without feeling his heart drawn to the practice of the most exalted virtue! "Did she leave, for a moment, her obscure retreat, the veneration of all surrounded her steps. Silent and gentle, she gave utterance only to the name of Jesus, accompanied with words of peace and maternal tenderness. Happy were the poor who received from her hands the alms of poverty! Happy the little children whom she blessed; the afflicted whom she consoled; the sick whom she visited; and those whom she assisted in their last agony. Happy above all others—a thousand times happy—the beloved disciple who witnessed, without a single moment's intermission, the spectacle of so many virtues." *

We cannot doubt that the apostles, pious women—indeed, all the faithful—eagerly desired to have the Most

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* Mgr. Pavy.

Blessed Virgin under their roof; but that privilege was accorded to Saint John by Jesus Himself. It is he, the apostle of love, the virgin disciple, who possesses that treasure on earth which excites the envy of the heavenly hosts; and it is through him that the Church assists, consoles, and rejoices her who is the common Mother of all Christians.

O privileged disciple, how truly may you rejoice! It is to you that Mary is confided! Your fidelity and love led you alone, among the apostles, to the foot of the cross, and your divine Master has abundantly recompensed you in commending to your care the faithful Virgin, who is also called the mother of chaste love.

Mary remains at Jerusalem until the fury of persecution compels the disciples to disperse. She then repairs to Ephesus, and here, as well as at Jerusalem, she appears to the eyes of all the very personification of every virtue.

She praises God for all the good that is accomplished through the ministry of the apostles, as well as for the abundant fruits that are destined to crown their labors. With what inexpressible joy does she not behold the realization of the words of her divine Son in reference to the establishment of His Church! The grain of mustard seed has taken root, and has already most wonderfully multiplied; the sacred edifice, firmly built upon a rock, is every day expanding before her eyes, and the nets of those who have been made fishers of men are daily filled with precious souls. Oh, how her heart is ravished with delight on witnessing this auspicious commencement of the conversion of the world — these first fruits of the tree of the cross! How happy when new disciples are presented to her by the apostles! With what affability and tenderness she receives those children who are given to her, and whom she loves with a love beyond expression! She commends them for having obeyed the inspiration of heaven, and believed in the blessed words of the gospel, and she exhorts them to perseverance in the path they have chosen, and which alone conducts to salvation.

O Mary, how admirable you appear in that manifestation of your maternity! What benefits do you not bestow upon the infant Church! How much do your words, your example, and, above all, your prayers, contribute to establish and maintain, among the faithful, submission to the Prince of the Apostles, a union of hearts and souls, fidelity to the precepts of the Gospel—everything, in a word, that constitutes the strength and beauty of the spouse of your divine Son!

But let us consider Mary in her interior virtues, and particularly in her devotion and piety. She nourishes her soul with recollections of the Passion of our Saviour, which is ever present to her mind. Ah! how often during her residence in Jerusalem, did her eyes, filled with tears, turn toward the hill of Calvary! How many times did she traverse the way of sorrows, compassionating anew the sufferings of her divine Son! And when circumstances forbid her to do otherwise, how often does she transport herself in spirit to that rock that was stained with the blood of the Redeemer, and again feel her maternal heart rent with the terrible emotions of that day of the great sacrifice.

No, she can never forget the scenes of the Passion which were so indelibly impressed on her soul. Besides, does she not see them mystically renewed every day, in the sacrifice of the altar, which is a representation and a continuation of that of the cross? and, while faith showed her, under the sacramental species, the Body and Blood of her Son, did it not show her that body as she had seen it on Calvary, where it was so frightfully mangled, and that blood as it flowed before her eyes, from the wounds of the adorable victim?

Every day she participated in the breaking of bread, in other words, in the divine banquet. And here, what a picture is presented to our piety! Mary approaches the holy table; from the hands of St. John, who is her adopted son, she receives the sacred Body of Jesus, her Son in the natural order, her Lord and her God, who alone constitutes her life, her happiness, and her joy. In her heart she adores Him whom she adored in the crib of Bethlehem and on the cross; and who now sits in the highest Heavens. What communications between her soul and the soul of Jesus! Ah! could anything less than a miracle have prevented her from sinking under the consuming emotions of a heart wholly inflamed with the fire of divine love!

APPLICATION.

Let us honor Mary in these last years during which she perfects, in her person, the image of her divine Son, and completes that edifice of holiness whose foundations were laid on the highest mountains. And, at the same time, let us honor the happy disciple with whom she lives, and whose purity and love rendered him worthy to possess such a treasure.

Like Mary, let us conform ourselves in all things to the will of God. Let us remember that we are placed on this earth only that we may love and glorify God, and that it is by our trials and crosses that we can glorify Him in the most meritorious manner. Let us esteem our own interests less than those of the Gospel. Let us do all in our power, especially all that our duty requires, to inculcate and extend the knowledge, love, and practice of our holy religion. Let us pass our lives in doing good, and in the performance of works of mercy, sanctified by a strict observance of the rules of holy obedience.

Let us strengthen ourselves in this good work by prayer, meditation, and frequenting the holy sacraments. Let us cherish a lively and most tender devotion to the Passion of our Blessed Lord, and to the adorable Eucharist, and let us never be absent, in spirit and in soul, from Calvary or from the tabernacle of the altar.

We shall thus become faithful imitators of Mary. We shall resemble her divine Son, Jesus Christ, more and more every day, and go on from virtue to virtue, until finally we are admitted to enjoy Him and His Blessed Mother forever in the kingdom of eternal glory.

PRAYER.

Blessed Virgin, full of grace from the moment of your immaculate conception, and whose whole life was but a continual advancement in sanctity and justice, accept the homage of admiration, veneration, and love which we offer you. Vouchsafe, O most tender Mother, to obtain for us, through your powerful intercession, the grace to imitate you faithfully; to advance continually towards that perfection to which we are called, so that, fructifying in our hearts the gifts with which God has enriched us in this life, we may receive them in their fulness in the life to come.

See *Résumés*, page 428.

35. — THE DEATH OF MARY.

I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ. — PHILIPP. i. 23.

CONSIDERATION.

DEATH, being the wages of sin, should not have been the inheritance of the immaculate Virgin, in whom there was not even the shadow of a transgression; but the Immaculate Word having made Himself subject to death in the great plan of the world's redemption, it was necessary that His Most Blessed Mother should also be subject to it, in order that she might have a more perfect conformity to Him.

He entered into His glory through death; Mary desired to enter there after Him only through the same gate.

She had for Him the most perfect love; but as love is satisfied with nothing short of an entire resemblance, she desired to resemble Him in everything, and, consequently, to die because He had died.

Destined to be the patroness of a good death, it was fitting that she should pass from life as all other children of Adam, so that she might teach us with what dispositions we should meet the approach of death.

All the perfection of all the saints, and every kind of merit for heaven, were necessarily united in Mary; but is it not at the hour of death that the perfection of the saints is in a special manner manifested? Is not this the occasion for their greatest merit? It was necessary, then, that Mary should see death.

Besides, she ardently desired it, because she knew with what favor God looks upon a religious resignation to death, and because she aspired with her whole heart and soul to be united with Jesus Christ in glory. "Her Son, her treasure," says St. Francis de Sales, "was in heaven; her heart was no longer in her body, for the Gospel says, 'Where thy treasure is there is thy heart also.' * There, in heaven, was the flesh of her flesh, the bone of her bone. Ah! how could she remain on earth, whose heart, soul, and life were in heaven?"

Her love for Jesus not only inspired her with a desire to die, but was in reality the cause of her death. It was a fire that was consuming her natural life, and was soon to consummate its entire extinction. No, it was neither old age or disease that caused the death of Mary; it was the love that inflamed her heart. All the elect die in love; a great number die for love. "Mary," says St. Ildephonsus, "went still further, and died of love."

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* St. Matt. vi. 21.

Ah! without a miracle she would long before have been dissolved, so ardent were the emotions of her heart. Her death, therefore, will be but the cessation of a miracle which has continued from the first moment of her existence, but which was every day becoming more manifest, inasmuch as the august Virgin, as she advanced in years, increased also in divine love.

In the meantime, the hour is fast approaching when her Divine Son shall no longer suspend the effects of that supernatural fire which consumes her, and when her soul, freed from its last fetters, shall soar aloft to that heaven which is its centre, and for which it has ever yearned with immeasurable love.

Let us, then, contemplate her in her last moments, keeping before our eyes the prominent features of that career which is drawing to a close. Death is the echo of life; in the death, therefore, of the Most Blessed Virgin we behold the reproduction of all that sublimity of a life so pure and so pleasing to God. It is but the crowning of the edifice of her sanctity, whose foundations were already laid in the heavens. She exhibits herself to our eyes resplendent with all those moral beauties which shone forth in her conduct at Nazareth, at Bethlehem, in the temple, on Mount Calvary, and in the upper room in Jerusalem. Adorned with every virtue in consummate perfection, she now approaches the portals of eternity.

St. Germain of Constantinople, and St. Thomas of Villanova, inform us that an angel announced to the Blessed Virgin that her days of sorrow were at an end, and that her Divine Son was about to reunite her with Himself in His kingdom, where the angels and saints awaited her with holy impatience. She welcomed with joy the long-looked-for moment which was at length about to arrive.

Nevertheless, the prospect of her approaching death was a source of the most profound grief to the Apostles and the faithful who were gathered around her. Oh! how deeply did they feel their separation from a Mother so sweet, so devoted, so full of divine love, from whom they derived so much comfort and instruction. They express their sorrow to her, and entreat her, says St. John Damascene, not to leave them orphans. She only reminds them that the will of God must be our will, and promises that she will intercede for them near her Divine Son. She assures them, moreover, that she will always be their most tender Mother and unfailing advocate. At their request, and as Jesus Christ had done on the day of His ascension, she gave them her blessing, and, in their persons, she also blessed all Christians of every age.

O, happy moment, when the Church, represented by the Apostles, bends under the dying hand of Mary, who invokes for her children, whom she is about to leave, the most abundant and salutary graces. She now sinks into an ecstasy of love; her eyes, fixed on heaven, behold her Divine Son, who invites her to come and possess the throne which He has prepared for her, saying, "Come, O my Mother, for 'I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink.' * I was in sorrow, and you shared in it with me through love for me. Come, O chaste dove, come, 'for winter is now passed;' † your labors are over, your Son awaits you."

And Mary answers, "My Son, 'Into thy hands I commend my spirit.'" ‡ She then pronounces the sacred name of Jesus, and, in a transport of divine love, her soul takes its flight to her well-beloved, who is present to bear her to heaven amid the acclamations and hymns of joy of the angels and saints.

APPLICATION.

Let us celebrate the death of Mary, so precious in the eyes of the Lord. Let us glorify our good Mother, who

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* St. Matthew xxv. 35. † Canticles ii. 11. ‡ Ps. xxx. 6.

has left behind her on earth the sweet perfume of every virtue, and now, sitting on the highest throne of glory, at the right hand of her Divine Son, rejoices by her presence the celestial choirs.

Let us courageously strive, and, with unremitting constancy, endeavor, by every means in our power, to merit the grace of a death like that of Mary. Above all, let us try to imitate her virtues, run after her to the odor of her ointments, and we shall arrive at that supreme happiness in which we now contemplate her. We know that death is the echo of life; let us live like Mary, and our death will be like hers.

Let us devoutly and fervently have recourse to her intercession; let us beg her to obtain for us the necessary grace to do the will of God, to accomplish with fidelity and zeal all the good He requires of us to resist the attacks of the enemy of our salvation, until, advancing from virtue to virtue, we attain perfection. Let us especially beseech her to assist us at the hour of our death, so that we may be crowned with the palm of victory.

But we must not only pray; we must earnestly work, that we may obtain the grace of a happy death. To this end, we must faithfully discharge all the duties of our state of life, avoid every occasion of sin, make reparation for the scandals we may have given, and live each day in such a manner as if it were our last.

Happy is that man who, when death approaches, enjoys the blessed consolation of knowing that there is nothing wherewith his conscience can reproach him; that his heart is filled with divine love; that he leaves behind him the sweet odor of a well-spent life, passed, like that of Jesus and Mary, in doing good. No, to such a man death is no longer death; it is but the commencement of the life that has no end.

PRAYER.

O Mary, pray for me now and at the hour of my death. The thought of that dreadful moment fills my soul with fear, for I know how unfaithful I have been and how often I have sinned against my Sovereign Judge. But remembering that thou art not only His Mother but mine also, I place myself under thy powerful protection with the most perfect confidence, because I know that He will refuse thee nothing.

"And when the moment of my last agony shall come, and my lips shall no longer be able to pronounce thy blessed name, remember, O Divine Mother, all the prayers I shall have addressed to thee during my whole life;" * and obtain for me, from the mercy of thy adorable Son, the grace that my death may be like thine, and that I shall leave this valley of tears only that I may celebrate in my true home His everlasting mercy.

See *Résumés*, page 429.

36. — THE ASSUMPTION OF MARY.

Who is this that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved? — CANT. viii. 5.

CONSIDERATION.

THE soul of Mary, separated from her body in a transport of love, immediately soars aloft to the highest heaven, and, enjoying in the fullest degree the bright vision of the Divinity, she exclaims, in transports of infinite happiness, "I found Him whom my soul loveth, . . . and I will not let Him go."* What glory is her inheritance! If God gives to all the just "good measure and pressed down, . . . and running over,"† what measure must the Virgin receive, in whom are united all the justice of angels and saints! Let us remember that glory is in proportion to grace, of which it is the consummation, and that, full of grace from the moment of her entrance into life, Mary so lived as continually to augment that divine treasure.

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* St. Bonaventure.

But the soul of this divine Mother shall not long remain separated from the body, for it enters into the designs of the Lord that, after a short separation, they shall again be united, and share alike the heavenly beatitude. "Love," says St. Francis de Sales, "carried off that beautiful soul, and left in its stead cold and pallid death. O death, what doest thou in that sacred body? Thinkest thou that thou canst hold it? Remember that the Son of that Virgin hath vanquished thee and made thee His slave. Thou shalt not long enjoy thy victory; the love which hath placed her soul in that habitation will soon drive thee thence. That body, which in life contracted no stain, shall experience none in death. That ark, like the one of old, is made of incorruptible wood."

The Immaculate Virgin, whose heart remained free from every affection of earth, cannot return to dust," says St. John Damascene; "Holy ark, it must be placed in the heavenly tabernacle. Ah! how can corruption possess that body, from which came forth Life itself?"

The Holy Ghost teaches us that "a father without honor is the disgrace of the Son."‡ From which Saint Augustine concludes that Jesus Christ has preserved from corruption the body of Mary; for it would have been unworthy of Him to see the body of His Most Holy Mother become the food of worms.

No, no; the divine Saviour could not abandon to the corruption of the grave, to become the food of worms, that breast from which he had drawn life; those arms which had so tenderly borne Him; those eyes which had watched over His infancy with so much solicitude; those lips which had so often pressed His adorable brow, and pronounced His sacred name with such fervent love; those feet so often wearied in His service; that heart which had never pulsated but for Him. Associated with Jesus in all His labors, sufferings, and death, it was necessary that Mary should also be associated with Jesus in His resurrection and ascension into Heaven. She bore too close a resemblance to Him during her entire life not to resemble Him when life was over; and thus she died only to throw off her mortality and be arrayed in glory.

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* Cant. iii. 4. † St. Luke vi. 38. ‡ Eccles. iii. 13.

At the moment fixed for her triumph, which, according to the most general belief, was the morning of the third day after her death, her soul, by the command of God, was reunited to her body, and through the power of her divine Son she came forth from the grave living, endowed with all the attributes of her new life and adorned with celestial splendor. Destined to be, after the sacred humanity of the Saviour, the first visible ornament of the New Jerusalem, she ascended majestically toward that glorious city, surrounded by angelic choirs who repeated, in their songs of joy, "Who is this that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved?"

She arrives at the heavenly courts where the blessed inhabitants of those eternal mansions await her. Oh! with what transports they salute her! With what acclamations they celebrate the triumph of the new Eve to whom, next to her divine Son, they are indebted for their happiness!

The august Trinity invites her to approach even the very depths of the divine essence, where she penetrates further than all the angels and saints. The Father receives her as His daughter, the Son as His Mother, and the Holy Ghost as His spouse. Come, said the three adorable Persons to her, the winter of thy tribulations has passed; thou hast worn more perfectly than all other creatures the crown of justice; receive now the triple crown which is the reward of thy fidelity.

And Mary bows in reverence while praising the Lord who "hath regarded the humility of His handmaid."* Then the Father gives her the crown of dominion over all creation; the Son places on her head the crown of knowledge and of wisdom, and endows her with such sentiments as are suitable to her who is the Mother of all the faithful, and whose mission it is to protect and defend them; the Holy Ghost gives her the crown of charity, penetrating her heart with all the fires of divine love, filling it with benevolence toward men and with zeal for their salvation.

At the same time, she is appointed Queen of angels and of men, protectress of the Church, and channel through which all graces flow to the human family. Enthroned next to her divine Son, she shines with a halo of glory more brilliant than that of all the prophets, martyrs, and virgins.

O solemn moment, which is to continue throughout all the ages of Eternity! "The solemn Ark, animated by the living God, dwells in the temple of the Lord. Mary has entered upon her glory and the exercise of her salutary mission. Angels and arch-angels glorify her with hymns of joy. Principalities and powers extol her; the heavenly virtues bless her, the dominations and the thrones rejoice in her, the cherubim and seraphim proclaim her praise.†

The canticles of Heaven are answered by those of earth, which are alike hymns of praise and of supplication. The faithful, contemplating the triumph of the Virgin, repeat from age to age: "O Mary, thrice Blessed! O glory of Virgins; thou hast exchanged the garments of mortality for the brilliant robes of immortality, and thou dwellest in the glorious temple of the Heavens next to God Himself. Ah! vouchsafe from thy abode on high to lend a favorable ear to our supplications, and hear our prayers." *

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* St. Luke i. 48. † St. John of Damascene.

APPLICATION.

In union with the Church triumphant and the Church militant, let us celebrate with the most lively joy, and the most fervent thanksgiving to the Lord, the Assumption of Mary, remembering that the glory of the Blessed Virgin is necessarily reflected on her children, and that we participate in the treasures which divine munificence has lavished upon her. Let us praise the Most Adorable Trinity for the extraordinary prerogative of deliverance from the power of death with which she was honored, and of her glorious Assumption into Heaven, in soul and body, where she is enthroned as our protectress and advocate.

Let us felicitate Mary on her virginal purity, for it was that virtue which, in a special manner, merited for her exemption from the corruption of the grave, and rendered her so dear in the sight of the Most Holy God. Let us, also, render to her equal felicitations on her humility, her obedience, her spirit of sacrifice, or, rather, of all the virtues, for it was the union of all the virtues that procured for her that immense weight of glory which is her inheritance.

Let us remember that we are invited to participate in her happiness, and endeavor to prove ourselves worthy of that inestimable privilege by being, like her, humble, pure, charitable, pious, devoted to Jesus, in the person of our neighbor, and detached from every earthly affection. Let our heart and our soul be always centred in Heaven, so that we may be able to say, with the holy Archbishop of Canterbury: "O Jesus, behold your Mother who leaves the earth to be reunited to You for ever. With her, I also withdraw my-

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* St. Gregory of Nanzianzen.

self from this world; yes, my heart is raised with her to Heaven to love You alone."

Let us strengthen our confidence and renew our courage. We have near the divine throne an all-powerful advocate who is filled with the most tender solicitude for our salvation. Ah! let us fervently beseech her to exercise, on our behalf, her ministry of goodness and mercy; to obtain for us an abundance of all the graces necessary to work out our own sanctification, and to labor unceasingly for that of our neighbor.

PRAYER.

O Most Blessed Virgin, whom we contemplate surrounded with all the splendors of celestial glory, be forever praised, exalted, and blessed for all the honors God has bestowed on thee, and especially for the sublime virtues which have merited such extraordinary privileges.

But from thy exalted throne, O Mother of Mercy, look down upon us, thy exiled children, sighing, weeping, and mourning in this valley of tears. Obtain for us, by thy powerful intercession, courage and strength to discharge every duty, so that, having faithfully corresponded to the designs of thy adorable Son, in this life, we may be admitted to the joys of everlasting glory in the world to come.

See *Résumés*, page 429.

37.—THE MOST HOLY HEART OF MARY.

All the glory of the King's daughter is within.—Ps. xliv. 14.

CONSIDERATION.

CALLED to the sublime dignity of Mother of God, Mary was endowed with all the moral qualities which a creature is capable of possessing, while she combined, in herself, more goodness, grandeur, courage, and generosity than all the most holy and most heroic souls that ever existed, considered as one person.

How, then, can we find words to express the excellence of her heart, which the Lord was pleased to form with His own hands, and enrich and adorn with all the treasures of His magnificence. Does she not, from the first moment of her immaculate conception, appear, in our eyes, as an incomparable treasure, a beautiful heaven, an august tabernacle, a sacred temple, a palace worthy of the King of kings? How can we sufficiently express what the heart of Mary became under the all-powerful action of that grace with which it was filled, and to which she corresponded with the most perfect fidelity? How can we conceive the degree of sublimity to which it was raised by means of its relations with the heart of Jesus? Ah! when we consider that the heart of Mary was the source of the natural life of that adorable heart, which, in return, communicated to her, most abundantly, that supernatural life of which the heart of Jesus is the ever-flowing fountain; when we consider the close and indissoluble union between the heart of Jesus and the heart of Mary, can we doubt that the infinite treasures of the one are abundantly imparted to the other?

The heart of Mary was a burning furnace of charity: it was the altar of holocaust upon which the divine fire was never quenched, and from which there incessantly ascended to God the sacrifice of praise and love. It fulfilled, in the most perfect manner, the divine precept: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength."* The love which inflamed the heart of Mary, and which finds its expression in the mystic language of the Spouse in the Canticles, was pure, ardent, generous, active, persevering; a love which never slumbered; which tribulation, instead of diminishing, only intensified and perfected, which was the active source of every thought and desire of her to whom the Church applies these words: "I am the Mother of fair love, and of favor, ... and of holy hope."

The heart of Mary, because of its perfect love of God, was filled with the most tender, affectionate, and generous charity toward man, for revelation teaches us that the true love of God implies also the love of our neighbor; and this charity, immense from the first moment of its existence, constantly increased until it reached, if we may use the expression, the infinite itself, at the moment when Jesus, dying on the cross, constituted Mary the Mother of all men, and when, on the day of Pentecost, that divine Mother received, in all their fulness, the fruits of the Holy Ghost.

Yes, our Mother carries us all in her heart. Ah! would we know what place we occupy in the loving heart of Mary, let us contemplate her on Calvary, at the foot of the altar of bloody sacrifice, and remember that she there offers to God, for us, Him who was her life, her joy, and her treasure, and whom she loved infinitely more than she loved herself! Her love for us was such that, in order to cooperate in the work of our redemption, she voluntarily offered her heart to that sword of grief by which it was so cruelly pierced. Ah! can we meditate on this without shedding tears of gratitude, and being filled with love for that good Mother whose charity toward us is as a vast, boundless ocean.

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* Deut. vi. 5. † Eccles. xxiv. 24.

What were the gentleness and the humility of the heart of Mary! and who could, with more truth than the august Virgin, utter those words of the divine Master: "Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart."* Does she not appear, in our eyes, as the personification of the most gentle love and the most perfect abnegation, whispering to each one of us, in the words of inspiration: "My spirit is sweet above honey,"† and realizing, in its fullest signification, the appellation of "handmaid of the Lord," which she bestowed upon herself?

The heart of Mary possesses in the same degree patience, resignation, the love of the cross; to suffer, in union with the heart of Jesus suffering, constituted, as it were, her every act of life. Ah! it was because this Most Blessed Virgin understood more perfectly than any other creature the invitation of Jesus Christ to take up the cross and follow Him. It was because she treasured up in her soul and meditated upon those evangelical maxims: "Blessed are they that suffer,"‡ "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me . . . ; for he that shall lose his life for my sake shall save it."§

Queen of martyrs, she became, in union with Jesus, the victim of expiation; Queen of Apostles, she desired, with the most intense desire, the glory of God, the spread of the Gospel, the triumph of the Church, the extinction of the empire of sin, the salvation of souls; and, so far as Providence required of her, she labored to these ends with a most generous zeal and unfaltering courage.

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* St. Matt. xi. 29. † Eccles. xxiv. 27. ‡ St. Matt. v. 10.
§ St. Luke ix. 23, 24.

It is, then, true that the most blessed heart of Mary was the model of hearts, the most perfect image of the heart of Jesus, the most faithful mirror of the sentiments of that divine Master. But what the heart of Mary was, it still is, and in a more consummate degree. Yes, let us contemplate the heart of Mary in heaven, and ask ourselves with what flames it is consumed for the love of God; with what tenderness it regards us, exiles in this world of affliction; with what compassion it is filled for us; what mission of mercy it exercises in our regard; what claims it has to the glorious appellations of "Fountain of divine grace," "Refuge of sinners," "Comfortress of the afflicted," "consolation and rest" of all who suffer and struggle in this vale of tears.

APPLICATION.

Let us bless God for all the treasures with which He has enriched the heart of Mary, and in which we are invited to participate. Let us glorify that immaculate heart, that garden of delights, into which, according to the expression of St. Bernard, the divine zephyrs have penetrated, and still penetrate, exhaling the abundant perfume of its flowers; that is to say, all graces and every supernatural gift.

Let us in a special manner celebrate the tenderness, love, and clemency of the heart of our good Mother; let us delight in proclaiming its merciful dispositions toward sinners, and in making known to all who are placed under our charge the mission of grace which the heart of Mary fulfils, near the sacred heart of Jesus, in constantly interceding for us.

Let us frequently have recourse to the heart of Mary, and beseech it, in the most fervent manner, to take a special interest in the work of our sanctification. Through the mediation of that tender heart, let us implore God for the conversion of sinners, particularly of those who are dear to us, and who may be, alas! estranged from God and on the road to eternal perdition. Oh! let us recommend them to the heart of Mary, and never cease our importunities until we shall have obtained the miracle of grace for which we prayed.

Let us approach that heart, whose maternal love invites all men to draw near to it, for we shall find therein an inexhaustible source of light, strength, consolation, and life. Let us approach it in our joys, and, through it, those joys will become heavenly; let us draw near to it in affliction, and our sorrows will be dispelled like the mists before the sun. In our moments of fervor let us be near the heart of Mary, and the ardor of our piety will be increased; if we are tepid, let us go to it, and energy and vigor will again take possession of our souls.

Let us make the heart of our Most Blessed Mother the channel through which our good desires, our pious intentions, our prayers, and every good act we perform shall flow, and we need not doubt that God will accept them, and bestow upon us, in return, abundant graces. Let us enter fully into the intentions of that heart, having the same sentiments and desires that Mary would have were she in our place.

Let us, with the assistance of divine grace, labor to conform our heart to that of the august Mother of God, by subduing every feeling of pride, self-love, and indifference that might quench the living fires of charity therein; by a constant and faithful practice of gentleness, humility, patience, zeal — in a word, all the virtues of our holy state, so that, after faithfully fulfilling all the duties of our condition here below, we may receive in heaven the crown that awaits those whose lives are spent in the service of God.

PRAYER.

O Heart of Mary, furnace of love, kindle in our hearts the fire of divine charity. Obtain for us that our hearts, redeemed by the blood of thy Son, may set at naught the pleasures of this world, and give themselves up entirely to Jesus. Be our strength in every conflict; teach us to baffle the wiles of the enemy of our salvation; show us how to live as you lived, and how to die as you died, in the love, and for the love of Jesus, so that hereafter we may reign with Him in His heavenly kingdom. Amen.

See *Résumés*, page 430.

38.—THE FAITH OF MARY.

"Blessed art thou that hast believed."—St. Luke i. 45.

CONSIDERATION.

HOW sublime must the faith of Mary appear in our eyes when it merited the encomium of the Holy Ghost, spoken through the lips of Saint Elizabeth, "Blessed art thou that hast believed." Did she not possess that virtue in the most exalted degree—perfect, universal, prompt, simple, submissive, active, firm, immovable, and was it not accompanied with the noblest and most excellent works of piety and religion?

Mary believed every word of revealed truth; everything that God had made known through His angels, the patriarchs, and the prophets; all that He taught by His Word made Man, and through the Church, which is the pillar and ground of truth. She put implicit faith in every word spoken to her by Gabriel announcing the mystery of the Incarnation; by Elizabeth celebrating her divine maternity; by Simeon predicting her dolors, and by Joseph communicating to her the orders he received from Heaven.

She believes promptly, simply, and entirely in everything that is told her on the part of the Lord. There is not in her even the shadow of hesitation or doubt. Unlike Moses, Gideon, and Zachary, she asks for no sign. God speaks; that is sufficient. She knows nothing but to receive His words with entire docility, no matter how wonderful, extraordinary, or strange were the events which they announced.

Ah! if the Lord said to the Canaanite woman, "O woman, great is thy faith,"* what would He have said to His Most Blessed Mother, who was to become the perfect type of that virtue? The Apostle† praises Abraham because he believed, on the words of the angels, that Sarah would become a mother in her old age; but how much more sublimely perfect was the faith of Mary when she believed, on the word of Gabriel, that she would become a Virgin Mother, and that her Son would be God Himself. Besides, the Church, in decreeing to her the glorious titles of "Queen of Patriarchs," "Queen of Prophets," "Queen of Martyrs," proclaims that her faith was more entire, submissive, courageous, unwavering, and constant than that of all the heavenly host.

How difficult of belief were the revelations of the angel who saluted her in the name of Heaven. He named the Father whose messenger he was; the Son, whom she would conceive in her chaste womb; the Holy Ghost, who would come upon her; and thus he laid before her the ineffable mystery of the Most Holy Trinity so little known before the promulgation of the Gospel law. He also announced, at the same time, the mystery of the Incarnation, hitherto hidden under the veil of symbols, and he told her that she was that virgin foretold by Isaias, and who, remaining a virgin, would bring forth a son who should be called the Son of the Most High, and who should "reign in the house of Jacob forever." * All these strange and wonderful things Mary believed, submitting, without reserve, her reason to the revelation that was made to her.

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*St. Matthew xv. 28. †Rom. iv. 19.

But how many other trials did the faith of the august Virgin undergo, over all of which she equally triumphed! She beholds her new-born Infant in the manger of Bethlehem, and she recognizes in Him the Eternal. She contemplates Him in the crib, poor, abandoned, and weeping, and she adores Him as the Creator of the world, the Lord of hosts, in whom is centred all the joy of Heaven. She beholds Him assuming the appearance of a sinner, by circumcision, and she blesses Him as the Holy of Holies. She sees Him in His flight to escape the cruelty of Herod, and her faith exhibits Him to her as the King of kings, the Lord of lords!

Such also was her faith during the hidden or private life of the Saviour. She never ceased to recognize Him as the Emmanuel, the Messiah who outwardly appeared only as an ordinary mechanic, passing His days in the obscurity of a poor workshop.

But it was on Calvary that Mary exhibited, in a special degree, the firmness of her faith. Terror seized upon the Apostles, and they fled. Doubt entered their souls. The light of faith that, up to that dreadful hour, shone so brightly, is extinguished by the fearful blasts of opprobrium and suffering which swept around their divine Master. "Scarcely," says St. Thomas de Villanova, "does there remain in them a spark of faith." But how different was it with Mary? Then, indeed, did she realize that expression of the wise man: "Her lamp shall not be put out in the night." † "She remained on her feet," says Saint

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* St. Luke i. 32. † Prov. xxxi. 18.

Antoninus, "sustained, as she was, by her faith in the divinity of Jesus Christ." "The Virgin," says Saint Bernard, "who had conceived by faith, alone remains constant in her faith during the Passion," and thus it is through her that the Church is maintained in all the purity and unchangeableness of faith. In Jesus outraged, crucified, agonizing, expiring, she recognized His divinity as fully as when He gave sight to the blind, and recalled the dead to life.

The faith of Mary was essentially practical, not lingering on barren speculation, but bringing forth works in entire accord with the principles revealed.

The whole life of the Most Holy Virgin was but the expression of her belief. Her opinions, her sentiments, her desires, her movements — in a word, everything in her — were regulated by the truths of the supernatural order. All her thoughts were in God and for God. In creatures she discerned, as in a divine Mirror, the marks of the power, wisdom, and goodness of the Creator; all her plans looked to the glory of God, the establishment of the gospel, and the salvation of souls.

The faith of Mary is, then, the very model of faith. How eminently salutary it has been to the world, and in what an inexpressible degree has it constituted the happiness, the merit, and the glory of this ever-blessed Virgin!

By her faith, say the Holy Fathers,* Mary opened the Heavens, and attracted to herself the Divine Word, whom the angel announced to her. As the doubt of the first Eve brought ruin upon the world, and thus made her the Mother of death, so the faith of the new Eve drew to her virginal womb the author of life, and made her the Mother of the children of God. "By her faith," says Saint Thomas de Villanova, "Mary captivated the heart of God." Oh! what grace flowed from this virtue! What merits did it not acquire for her. How often did it procure for her tranquillity of mind, joy of soul, and calmness of heart. What progress did she make in the science of good, in the acquisition of truth, in that knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ in which consists, according to the teaching of the divine Master Himself, eternal life.*

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* Sts. Irenæus, Tertullian, Augustine, Anselm.

APPLICATION.

Let us honor Mary as the model and the mother of all who have faith. Let us felicitate her on the power and heroism of her faith, saying, with St. Elizabeth, "And blessed art thou that hast believed," for thou hast merited, both for thyself and us, that those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord, and which shall superabundantly work out our redemption.

Let us cherish our faith as the most precious legacy that could be handed down to us, and commiserate those who have not received or have lost it. Ah ! what would we be, without that precious gift of heaven, but frail barks without compass or rudder, tossed about by every wind of doctrine until we should be lost in the gulf of skepticism and infidelity !

Let us bless God for having placed the light of truth before our eyes; let us also, from the depths of our souls, give Him thanks for having called so many others to the light of faith, and let us even celebrate, as the happiest day of our life, the day on which, at the baptismal font, we were admitted into the fold of Christ.

Let us endeavor to impart to our faith the characteristics which we have been considering in the faith of Mary. Let us strive to make progress in the spirit of faith; and especially should we do so since such is also the spirit of our Institute. Like Mary, let us subject every thought to the light of revelation, neither acting nor speaking but in obedience to the order and the will of God; let us always, whether in sorrow or in joy, in darkness or in sunshine, raise our hearts to that Sovereign Master, regarding everything that may happen, whether agreeable or otherwise, only as an occasion for adoring and praising His Providence.

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* St. John xvii. 3.

Let us ask, through the intercession of Mary, the grace of truly living by faith to the end of our lives, so that we may then be admitted to the contemplation of Truth in its very essence, unrestrained and cloudless, and enjoy the glorious heritage of everlasting peace.

PRAYER.

O Mary, faithful Virgin, Model and Mother of every true believer, whose faith was, in the highest degree, pure, living, and acting, why do I not more earnestly endeavor to imitate you in my holy state? Obtain for me, through your generous intercession, the grace of being truly animated by the spirit of faith, to make it my rule of life, so that I may accomplish all the good which belongs to my vocation, and prove myself worthy of the recompense promised to those who have believed, and, by their works, have manifested their belief.

See *Résumés*, page 430.

39.—THE HOPE OF MARY.

I am the Mother . . . of holy hope.—ECCL. xxiv. 24.

CONSIDERATION.

IF, as the doctors of the Church teach, our hope is in proportion to our faith in the goodness, the power, and the immutability of God's promises, as well as in the infinite merits of Jesus Christ; if, as the soul advances in humility and self-diffidence, it also increases in the virtue of hope; if, as St. John teaches,* he whose heart is without reproach has an especial claim on the favors of God, the hope of Mary must have been perfect, and her confidence in God full and entire.

And who, in truth, has ever equalled the august Virgin in her faith in the goodness, the power, and immutability of God's word, and in the infinite merits of Jesus Christ? Did not her faith merit the encomiums of the Holy Ghost Himself? Does she not celebrate in her Canticle, with the rapturous fervor of inspiration, the goodness, the power, and the mercy of God, and declare that, through the merits of our Saviour, the divine mercy shall extend throughout all generations? Who so humble and so meek, since, Mother of God, she takes upon herself but the title of His handmaid? Who enjoyed such peace of heart as she, who, conceived without sin, never experienced even the shadow of evil?

Did she not, moreover, experience the favors vouchsafed to her by Divine Providence, and was she not conscious of the power she exercised over the heart of God by her prayers? And was she not, above all, intimately united with the Divine Mediator, through whom we all have access to the Father and obtain every blessing?

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*I St. John iii. 21.

Let us, then, honor her as the perfect model of Christian hope, and consider the beautiful and admirable aspects in which she exhibits herself in regard to that virtue.

The hope of Mary was constant, firm and resolute. From the very first pulsation of her heart to the last moment of her life, she preserved in her soul that sentiment of hope, or, rather, she never ceased to develop and strengthen it. At all times and on all occasions, and especially in those seasons of trial and suffering with which it pleased Providence to visit her, she always looked up to Heaven for help. How often was she called on to undergo trials — trials under which the strongest and most courageous hearts would have sunk! But never once did she doubt the goodness of Providence or give way to anxiety or inquietude. She carried her faith even to a higher point than Abraham, for she hoped against all hope, and that which, from a natural point of view, would have had the effect of discouraging her, only served to make her faith shine forth the more brightly, and, with respect to her, only increased and supported its vitality, as a blast of wind, instead of extinguishing, rather gives additional strength to a burning torch.

Do we not see her divine Son, at the marriage-feast of Cana, seeming to refuse the request which she had made of Him. And yet, she was assured that He heard her, for she immediately directed the servants to obey the orders which He should give.

But it was chiefly on the day of the Passion of our Lord that the hope of Mary manifested itself in all its strength. When she beheld the disciples yielding to cowardice and fear at the ignominies and sufferings of their divine Master; when she saw Him crucified between two malefactors, and witnessed the triumph of the Jews, who blasphemed His holy name; when she contemplated Him dead on the cross, and received, in her arms, His body so frightfully mangled; and when she afterward saw Him laid in the sepulchre, she was still unshaken in her confidence, and, by the light of faith, her soul beheld Him already arisen, and, by that miracle, disconcerting His enemies and humbling them to the earth.

She manifested the same disposition after the Ascension of our Saviour. She sees the Church persecuted, but she is confident in the assurance that the preaching of the Gospel shall have the success which has been promised, and will triumph over all the attacks of the world and hell. Fulfilling toward the first Christians her office of Mother of Holy Hope, she revives their courage, when they are almost overwhelmed by the fury of the tempest, and, by her example and her counsel, she does not cease to excite and strengthen in their hearts the sentiment of the most entire confidence in Him, whose goodness is inexhaustible, whose power is infinite, and whose promises are irrevocable.

The hope of Mary was prudent and active, wholly free from presumption and false security. While she relies entirely on God, she nevertheless discharges to its fullest extent her own duty. On the one hand, she reposes entire confidence in Providence; on the other, she acts as if everything depended on her own personal exertion. She neglects nothing that can lead to perfection, knowing that God desires our own co-operation in the assistance which He gives us.

The hope of Mary was also pure, noble, and elevated in its object. The Virgin, pre-eminently endowed with divine wisdom, desires not the pleasures and the advantages of this earthly pilgrimage. Ah! she knows too well how false, how transient, how dangerous they are. The pleasures of grace and of glory are the only objects of her desires, and, consequently, of her hope. That which she looked for, with an entire confidence, and from the very beginning, was the coming of the Messiah at the time pointed out by the prophets; the establishment and the propagation of His kingdom throughout the world; the destruction of the empire of Satan and Death; and the possession of Heaven with its glory and with its endless beatitude.

The hope of Mary was animated with love and filial affection. It was, as it were, the fruit of her faith and devotion toward God, whose tenderness she had experienced, and to whose care she had committed herself as a child into its mother's arms. In Him her heart reposed with unalterable tranquillity, and thus she realized, in their fullest extent, the words of the royal prophet: "In peace in the self-same I will sleep, and I will rest; for thou, O Lord, singularly hast settled me in hope." * "For thou art my strength and my refuge; and for thy name's sake thou wilt lead me and nourish me." †

APPLICATION.

Let us renew our confidence in God, and, to this end, let our hearts be more and more penetrated with a sense of His infinite goodness, His omnipotence, and the unchangeableness of His promises. Let us remember what our Divine Saviour did for us, and how dear we are to His adorable heart, and never forget how much we can obtain from heaven by the intercession of the angels and saints, and especially through that of Mary.

Yes, let us embrace the practice of hope, of that virtue so sweet, so consoling, and which alone can inspire us with twofold strength in the accomplishment of good. Let us guard against presumption, taking care, at the same time, that we fail not in confidence. Let us resist, from the very first moment, every feeling that might cause disquietude or discouragement. "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able." ‡ Let us

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* Ps. iv. 9, 10. † Ibid. xxx. 4. ‡ 1 Cor. x. 13.

do His work, and we may feel entirely assured that He will do ours.

In our own sphere of action let us endeavor to revive the spirit of hope in such souls as we may find overshadowed with sadness, disquietude, or discouragement. Let us sympathize with them, and, by our conversation, our example, and our assistance, excite in their hearts feelings of confidence in the goodness of God and in the protection of the Most Blessed Virgin.

But in order that we may be enabled to do this effectually, our own hope must be constant, firm, courageous, pure, filial — in a word, an image of that of Mary.

Oh! how beneficial will this be to us! Like our good Mother, we will be a means of consolation to our neighbor; our days will be days of peace; we shall acquire additional strength to discharge faithfully all the duties of our state; we will glorify as we ought to do the divine goodness, and thus merit, not only for time but also for eternity, its manifestation in our regard.

PRAYER.

O Mary, mother of holy hope, how much have you glorified the goodness and the power of God by that virtue! How often have you restored tranquillity to the souls of those with whom you were brought in contact! Deign to fulfil the same office of charity in our regard. Vouchsafe to us thy powerful protection, so that our hearts may be animated with the most entire confidence in God, that we may resolutely and courageously persevere in His holy work, accomplish His divine will, and thus enjoy in heaven that glorious inheritance for which we so ardently hoped during our pilgrimage on earth.

See *Résumés*, page 431.

40. — THE LOVE OF MARY TOWARD GOD.

I am the Mother of fair love. — ECCL. xxiv. 24.

CONSIDERATION.

NEXT to the substantial and eternal love which unites the three Persons of the Most Blessed Trinity, and that which the Word has for His holy humanity, to which He is hypostatically united, there is nothing so wonderfully grand as the love of the three Divine Persons for her who is the well-beloved daughter of the Father, the august Mother of the Son, and the spotless Spouse of the Holy Ghost. But in return — and this is the subject of her greatest glory — no creature ever so loved God as did this holy Virgin whom the Church presents to us as the model of the most perfect love, and to whom she has applied the inspired words: "I am the Mother of fair love."

Endowed from the very first moment of her conception with a singular grace of divine love, and corresponding to it in the most perfect manner throughout her whole life, she merited still greater graces, to which she likewise corresponded, in entire accordance with the merciful designs of God.

Devoting herself to study and meditation on His most adorable perfections with a submissive spirit, inflamed with divine love, and with a heart absolutely free from every earthly affection, she felt the whole influence of that Uncreated Beauty, ever ancient and ever new, whose loveliness is infinite.

"Where purity exists," says St. Anselm, "love also exists." But no heart has ever been so pure as that of the Immaculate Virgin. None, therefore, can equal hers in love. Can there be a doubt of this when we place before our minds the close and intimate union that existed between Mary and the Word who became her Son? "God," says St. Jerome, "who is loveliness, came upon the earth to enkindle in the hearts of men the fire of His love; but none could be so deeply penetrated with that divine fire as the heart of Mary, which, free from every earthly affection, was wholly inflamed with heavenly love."

Sharing, in an inexpressible degree, the sentiments of Him who has said, "But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father has given me commandment so do I," * Mary loved God with a love of which nothing can convey to our minds an exact idea; and she was able to say, in the fullest meaning of the words, "My beloved to me and I to Him," † "Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever." ‡

In what language do the Fathers of the Church speak of the love of Mary for God! "That love," say they, "was such that at its very commencement it surpassed that of the greatest saints at the end of their holy career. It was superior to that of all the saints together." §

"Nay, if from all the love of all the pure creatures that ever existed one love could be formed, it would not equal that of the Most Blessed Mary." ||

"Were all creatures gifted with the eloquence of St. Paul, and even with the language of angels, they would still be unable adequately to express the ecstatic love of Mary, who was not only a vessel of election, but the very temple of the Divinity." ¶ "Intimately united with Him who is a consuming fire, it was impossible that she should not become, by grace, what He was by nature." ** "Iron which is kept a long time in fire comes out so red and

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* St. John xiv. 31.

† Cant. ii. 16.

‡ Ps. lxii. 26.

§ St. Bernardine.

|| St. Anselm.

¶ St. Bernard.

** Jules de Chartres.

glowing that it may be called fire itself; so must it have been with the heart of Mary united to the heart of Jesus, or, rather, dwelling in that furnace of infinite love." *

"Let every tongue be silent, for the love of Mary surpasses everything that can be spoken — everything that can be conceived." † "No, there is no power of intellect that can reach, no eloquence that can worthily exalt, the perfection of the love which consumes that virginal heart." ‡ "Mary alone has fully satisfied the first commandment: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy strength, with all thy soul.'" § "She so loved God that the seraphim might have learned from her how to love," ‖ "and that she thus merited to be called the Queen of love." ¶

O immaculate heart, thou wert so penetrated with the fire of love that thou appearedst to be nothing but love. Nothing can equal the ardor of thy charity. Thou wert a furnace of love — an ocean of love. Yes, the temple of love, the throne of love, the very altar of love!

"No, it could have been nothing less than a continual miracle that Mary could have loved as she did and not have died." ** So it was that, by a special privilege, she loved God with a love always burning.†† There was in her soul a contemplation of love which was never interrupted, by means of which she was always rising above herself, and approaching every day more closely to the source of holy love.

"Her ordinary occupations experienced no interruption from the exercise of her love, nor did she allow that love to be overshadowed for a moment by the pursuits of her daily life." * "Every hour of her life she spent in loving God." † "Her sleep even did not arrest the gush of piety with which her soul was overflowed, for she could say, with the Spouse in the Canticles: 'I sleep, but my heart watcheth.'" ‡

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* St. Ildephonsus.

† St. Thomas de Villanova.

‡ St. Anselm.

§ Albertus Magnus.

‖ Richard de St. Victor.

¶ St. Francis de Sales; St. Liguori.

** St. Thomas de Villanova.

†† Bernardin de Buste.

The ardor of her love not only did not abate, but it was constantly growing stronger. It was like a fire in a thick forest, which spreads to everything within its reach. Every moment of the life of Mary was but a transition stage to a higher virtue; and it was only when her soul had reached the most exalted degree of divine charity that it escaped from her body, and merged in Him who was the object of her affections.

Such was the love of God in the immaculate heart of Mary that it knew no emotion, no sentiment, but that of God. It was an active, burning love, leading her to do nothing, to think of nothing but what tended to the glory of God. It was a generous, a sublime love, attesting, in a manner as striking and convincing as if it were of revelation, that it was a sacrifice voluntarily offered and complacently received.

APPLICATION.

Let us honor Mary by the title of "Mother of divine love," which is so dear to her. Let us glorify her immaculate heart, which was during her life a burning furnace of heavenly charity. Let us remember that our hearts should be conformed to hers, and burn with the same fires of divine love. To this end let us strive to advance daily in the love of God; to be faithful to that grace which sovereign goodness ever offers in the words of His holy inspiration: "My Son, give me thy heart." § Let us study and meditate on the perfections of God, and especially on His goodness,

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* St. Peter Damian. † St. Bernardin. ‡ Cant. v. 2.

§ Prov. xxiii. 26.

His tenderness, and His mercy. Ah! can we dwell on these holy thoughts without feeling our hearts burning with love for Him — without turning to Him with all the ardor of which our souls are capable! Let us be particularly watchful against everything that might prove an obstacle to the increase of divine love in our souls; every feeling of distrust or doubt; and, above all, let us remember that our duty — members as we are of a religious order — is reverentially to hear, and implicitly to obey the orders of our superiors. Let us exhaust, as it were, divine love in devotion to the sacred and immaculate heart of Mary, through which it has pleased Jesus Christ that the treasures of love with which His own adorable heart is filled should come to us. Let us exhaust this divine love even more in devotion to the adorable Eucharist, by frequent and fervent communions, for nothing can better strengthen our souls in grace, and enkindle in them the holy fires of divine love.

PRAYER.

O Mary, thou who wast called by St. Francis de Sales "Queen of love, the most loving, the most beloved of all creatures," vouchsafe, we beseech thee, to impart to us one spark of that heavenly fire with which thy soul ever burned for God.

You besought your Son on behalf of the nuptial party at Cana of Galilee. Oh! will you refuse to pray for us who, alas! are so lukewarm in our love for God? O sweet Mother, say to Him, "Their love waxes cold," and your words will suffice to re-establish us in the gift of divine love, and, with your example before our eyes, to make us advance from day to day in heavenly charity, until we finally share in the everlasting temple of love, in those blessings which God has reserved for those who love Him.

See *Résumés*, page 431.

41. — THE LOVE OF MARY FOR JESUS.

Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee. — JOHN xxi. 15.

CONSIDERATION.

NO creature could utter with as much truth as Mary the words which the prince of the Apostles uttered: "Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee." Ah! what can convey to us an idea of this mystery of her love for our adorable Saviour? Lamenting the death of Jonathan, David exclaims: "I grieve for thee, my brother Jonathan, exceeding beautiful and amiable to me above the love of woman. As the mother loveth her only son so did I love thee." * We thus perceive that the love of a mother for an only child is, of all the natural affections, the most ardent, the most lively — nay, stronger than any other human emotion.

From the standpoint of nature, how sublime and exalted must have been the love of Mary for Jesus! She is the Mother, the Mother preordained and chosen of all earthly creatures, who possessed more tender devotion for her Child than belongs to the ordinary heart of humanity, because she was a Virgin Mother, uniting in herself, as St. Anselm explains, all the love which in human nature is possessed by father and mother. She is the Mother of an Only Son, who, of all the children of men, is the most beautiful, the most loving, the wisest, the noblest, and the most bountiful — of a Son who resembles her, and with whom she has an entire conformity of heart.

She saw Him, as "He advanced in wisdom, and age, and grace," † manifesting more and more the qualities which

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* 2 Kings i. 26. † St. Luke ii. 52.

He possessed in their plenitude. Oh! how much was that love, already intense, augmented by her constant associations with Him — in that wonderful intimacy between such a mother and such a Son which continued for more than thirty years!

The love of Mary for Jesus appears to us an ocean, of which no human eye can see the shore. What must it be if we contemplate it in its supernatural relation?

Of all the sentiments that reign in the heart of the Ever-Blessed Virgin, the love of God is the one that predominates. It so possesses her soul that the very seraphim are lost in its admiration, knowing that the fire of divine love which consumes their own hearts is, when compared with hers, but as a spark before a living furnace. But Jesus is God. All the love of Mary for God is but her love for Jesus. Ah! what thoughts must have passed through her soul when she knew that she bore the Divine Word, the Eternal Son of the Father, the Saviour God, Uncreated Wisdom — Him who is the only Good, the only true Happiness! What must have been the ecstasies of her soul when she gazed upon Him, a little infant lying upon His bed of straw; then the poor mechanic, resting from the toil of the day; again, the author of the most wonderful miracles; the Priest and the Victim of the stupendous sacrifice; and finally the vanquisher of death, shining with everlasting glory.

Jesus is the splendor of the Father and the object of His benign complacency. Whoever knows this Divine Master is forced to love Him with a love proportioned to His knowledge of Him. But who has ever known Jesus as Mary did? Who has ever been placed face to face with Him and watched Him so closely? Who has entered into that adorable heart as she, and contemplated those divine qualities that will ravish with delight for all eternity the choirs of the heavenly Jerusalem? Love invites love.

Hence Jesus loved Mary with a love next to that which He gave to His Heavenly Father. Ah ! was it not a miracle that the heart of this Divine Mother was not consumed with the fire of love for such a Son?

Yes, O Holy Virgin, you loved your Son with a love incomprehensible to every creature—a love which He alone can comprehend. You loved Him because of His adorable perfections and of His goodness toward you. But you also loved Him for His love for us. Oh, with what ecstacies have you kissed those hands which were to wear our chains, those feet which were to be wearied in carrying the Gospel of peace, "in bringing good tidings!" *

Mary loved Jesus at all times and under all circumstances. Her affection for Him was not confined to His adorable person; it extended to everything which represented Him or recalled Him to her mind. For His sake she loved with ineffable love all the faithful who compose His mystic body, but more particularly little children, the poor, the sick, and the infirm. She loved everything He did, His words, His doctrine, His holy name, everything that related to Him.

The love of Mary for Jesus was persevering, firm, inexhaustible. Ah! if the Apostle has said, "Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus,"† how much more fervently could the Most Blessed Virgin have used this language! She loved Him when she saw Him in all the graces of infancy and manhood; she equally loved Him, when, according to the prophecy of Isaias, He appeared "as it were a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted." ‡ Her sentiments toward Him were unchangeable, because they sprang from those entertained for Him by His heavenly Father.

The love of Mary for Jesus was strong, courageous, and devoted, manifesting itself by a life of self-denial, of labor,

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* Isaias lii. 7. † Rom. viii. 39. ‡ Isaias liii. 4.

and of sacrifice. And here what a picture is presented to our admiration! Let us go back to Bethlehem, to Egypt, to Nazareth, and to Jerusalem. Everywhere we behold this Mother of love lavishing her cares on this God of love who has become her Son, bestowing on Him all in her power, and only regretting that she had not more to give. Do we not behold her the first after Him on the way to Calvary, and proving her love by clinging to the cross, and, as a mother, sharing in all the anguish of that dreadful occasion!

Ah! not only did she not fear death, but she even desired it, as the means by which she would more fully resemble her beloved Son; and, while waiting until it would be His holy will to call her to Himself, all her delight was in carrying her cross; and, the more it resembled that which was borne by Him, the greater delight she took in it.

O holy Virgin, what zeal in doing good did your love for Jesus inspire! And what merit did you not acquire in the sight of the Lord! What recompense must be yours in the mansions of eternal love!

APPLICATION.

Let us here enter into ourselves and see if our hearts, which ought to resemble that of our good Mother, truly and really love Jesus. To this end, let us recall to mind the principal marks of love for this divine Redeemer. Those who truly love Jesus keep His law, observe His precepts as well as His counsels, as He requires of them in their state. Those who truly love Jesus think frequently of Him, esteem it their happiness to celebrate His feasts, to meditate on His perfections, to hold converse with Him, interiorly and exteriorly, to visit Him in His holy tabernacle, and to receive Him in holy communion.

Those who truly love Jesus live in Him and for Him; their only ambition is to please Him; their most ardent desire is to see Him known, loved, and glorified, and it is thus they devote themselves to Him without reserve.

Those who truly love Jesus, never suffer themselves to be cast down or discouraged. In their trials, they stand by the cross in company with Mary. They consider the afflictions and troubles of life as occasions by which they can prove that they love this Divine Saviour for His own sake, and not merely for the sensible graces with which He sometimes favors them.

Those who truly love Jesus do not permit any affection to dwell in their hearts incompatible with that love. They desire only to be inflamed with the holy and pure fire of divine love. The beloved of their souls is their only object, and they aspire only to render themselves more and more agreeable in His eyes, and thus to merit admittance into that Heavenly kingdom where, with Mary, the angels and the saints, they may forever contemplate His infinite loveliness.

PRAYER.

O Heart of Mary! O sanctuary of love! How I desire to participate in the flames which consume you!

Holy Virgin, whose most ardent desire in glory is to see the love of Jesus propagated throughout the earth, grant, through your powerful protection, that your desire may be most fully realized. O Mother of fair love, by your own love for your adorable Son, obtain for us the grace to love Him with a pure, ardent, courageous, devoted, persevering love, a love like yours, which will give us a claim to the sovereign beatitude destined for the true friends of our divine Saviour.

See *Résumés*, p. 432.

42.—LOVE OF MARY FOR HER NEIGHBOR.

Love is strong as death. — CANT. viii. 6.

CONSIDERATION.

TO form an adequate conception of the love of Mary toward her neighbor, we must understand to what perfection the august Virgin carried her love of God, her obedience to His holy law, her conformity of heart to the heart of Jesus, and her docility to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost.

It is a truth taught by all the Fathers of the Church that the more we love God the more we love our neighbor; but no creature having been more inflamed with the love of God than Mary, none could have a more ardent charity for man. Model of obedience, she observed in its fullest extent the law of God, and, consequently, she fulfilled in its fullest meaning that precept of charity: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." *

No heart was so much inflamed with the love of Jesus as Mary's, none so conformable as hers to the adorable heart of that Divine Master. It was, then, impossible that she should not love with an unspeakable love those in whom her faith showed her the brothers of Jesus, the members of His mystic body, His second self, whom He so loved that He did not hesitate to shed for their salvation the last drop of His adorable blood! Destined to point out to Christians the path of evangelical perfection, she observed more perfectly than any other the commandment which is the abridgment of the new law, and which Jesus Christ gave to

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* St. Mark xii. 31.

His Apostles when He said to them, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." *

Faithful Virgin, she co-operated with all that the Spirit of love had wrought in her heart, in which He reigned supreme; and under the influence of the abundant grace which He communicated to her, she could not but have the most perfect love for her neighbor.

No, we cannot comprehend the sublimity of her love, above which there is none except that love of God for man which caused the Only Begotten Son to come down from heaven, led Him into the very depths of humiliation, and finally fastened Him to the cross! Mary loved her neighbor with a love universal and enduring. No doubt her affections were properly regulated, and were pre-eminently bestowed on those united to her by the ties of blood, or whom the law commanded her more especially to love; but no one was excluded from her heart. Her love embraced the universe and extended to all generations. She loved even the enemies of her Divine Lord at the very moment when they were crucifying Him!

The love of Mary for her neighbor was not concentrated in herself; she communicated it, though in different degrees, to all with whom she came in contact. At the sight of her acts of charity, every heart was inflamed, as it were, naturally, with the most ardent love. Who can say, therefore, how much she contributed to that union of the first believers, of whom it is said: "They had but one heart and one soul." †

Mary loved her neighbor with a love ever increasing. From the moment of her Immaculate Conception she was filled with love for all the children of Adam, whose sister she was, and of whom she was to become the co-redemptrix and the mother; and that love was developed more

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* St. John xv. 12. † Acts iv. 32.

and more as the divine love, which was its source, continued to manifest itself in her.

To what a degree did it not reach at the moment of the Incarnation of the Word!—of that mystery of love by which the Son of God assumed our nature, and, in His adorable person, deified humanity! How did it expand throughout all the mysteries of the life of the Saviour, and especially in that of His Passion!

Who has not felt how profoundly our hearts are impressed with the last words of persons who are dear to us! Now, the last words of Jesus to Mary were those by which He appointed her our Mother, and gave us to her as her children, in the person of the well-beloved disciple. From that moment she must have felt for us a love far surpassing all her previous love. When Jesus said to her, "Woman, behold thy Son,"* He filled her heart with such love toward each one of us, that it is beyond the reach of human understanding to clearly comprehend.

And yet her love for us must be ever increasing, as it was, in fact, increased by the descent of the Holy Ghost upon her on the day of Pentecost, and by her daily exercise of it during those last years which she consecrated to her duty in the character of Mother assigned to her by Jesus Christ. It reached its consummation when this Mother of love departed from the scene of her earthly labors, after having blessed the Apostles and the faithful who were in tears, and having assured them that, having loved them on earth, she would not cease to love them in Heaven.

The love of Mary for us was not a barren affection; it was exemplified by the most generous zeal, the most constant and heroic devotion. Oh! how can we express in words what it prompted her to do! To give our life for those we love, says the Evangelist,† is the greatest mark of love; now, such was the disposition of Mary, at all times, in regard even to the worst of men.

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* St. John xix. 26. † Ibid. xv. 13.

Ah! it is not enough to say: Your love, O holy Virgin, exhibited itself in an extraordinary degree, exhausting our admiration, and calling forth tears of gratitude. That which, in the estimation of the world, is considered the greatest mark of love, is not so regarded by you. There is a life, that of your Son, infinitely dearer to you than your own, and for which you would lay down your own life a thousand and a thousand times; yet, you consented that that life should be sacrificed for our salvation!

Oh! what an abyss is your charity! What eye can penetrate its depths! At that momentous hour, when the adorable victim of our redemption is already on the altar, divine Justice asks your consent to the bloody sacrifice. What will you do, O holy Virgin? Will you say to Jesus, "Come down from the cross?" No, your heart is so much inflamed with love for the children of men, that for their sake you are willing to sacrifice Jesus Himself.

APPLICATION.

"On ascending into Heaven," says St. Bernard, "Mary has lost none of her love for us." "If, during her exile on earth," says St. Liguori, "her pity for the afflicted was so great, that pity has become greater now that she has reached her eternal home."

Oh! what a subject of joy, and what a motive of confidence for us! We are the beloved of Mary; our good Mother carries us all in her heart; our names are there engraved in letters of fire. From heaven, where she invites us to join her, she looks down upon us with the most affectionate tenderness, and, offering us her merciful protection, she stretches forth her hands toward us to sustain us, to raise us, and point out to us the way to everlasting rest.

Let us, in return, love this divine Mother, whom the Church so justly styles, "Mother most amiable." Let us promise her a filial affection, corresponding, as much as it is possible for us to make it, to her great tenderness toward us.

Following the example of Mary, let us be all charity toward our neighbor. Let this divine virtue predominate in our hearts. Children of the Father who is in Heaven, and who is essentially Love, and of the Virgin Mary who was, as it were, the personification of that love, let us have a pure, cordial, and lively affection for each other, and testify it by our kindness, our good offices, our eagerness to serve, and our devotion to the interests of others.

Let us form our hearts after the model of the heart of Mary, for it is thus we shall arrive at that abode where our good Mother awaits us, and where nothing reigns but love.

PRAYER.

O heart of Mary, faithful mirror of the Heart of Jesus, be thou forever blessed for thy love toward us. You have loved us most tenderly and constantly. Oh! vouchsafe to continue your love toward us, and to interest yourself for us with the divine Heart over which you have all power.

Help us by your powerful intercession, O Mother of love, so that we may be able faithfully to keep the Evangelical precept of love for our neighbor, until our charity in his regard shall obtain for us the privilege, according to the promise of your adorable Son,* of being in the number of those who shall behold Him, forever and ever, in the temple of eternal love.

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* See St. Matt. xxv. 40.

See *Résumés*, page 424.

P

43.—THE HUMILITY OF MARY.

He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid.—ST. LUKE i. 48.

CONSIDERATION.

TO have any conception of the perfection with which Mary practiced humility, it would be necessary to know how far she excelled in that which is the source of this sublime virtue which is, according to St. Bernard, "the foundation and guardian of all the others."

"Humility," says St. Augustine, "is the love of God carried even to contempt for ourselves," and Mary loved God more than all the angels and saints together can love Him. Humility is justice causing us to pay to God the homage of absolute dependence which we owe Him, and to disclaim for ourselves, personally, everything but what we possess of ourselves. Now, who has equalled in justice her whom the Church calls "Mirror of Justice"? Moreover, were not the very relations of Mary with the Word of God, become her Son, of such a nature as to inflame her with the love of humiliation and self-denial? Did He not say, "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart,"* and was not Mary the first to understand and practice His divine lessons? Ah! when she beheld Him in Bethlehem, a little child reposing in a manger; or at Nazareth, an humble artisan gaining His daily bread by the sweat of His brow; above all, when she beheld Him on Mount Calvary, overwhelmed with insults, dying on the ignominious tree, could she do otherwise than, with all the powers of her soul, annihilate herself before God and man?

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* St. Matthew xi. 29.

Yes, Mary carried humility to the most perfect degree; and, "while," says St. Bernardine, of Sienna, "there never existed a creature more exalted than that holy Virgin, so there never was one who conceived more humble sentiments of herself." She did not, it is true, conceal from herself the singular privileges with which she was favored; but she beheld them all in their Author, and looked upon them only as the effect of His liberality and goodness. Discerning what is the share of grace, and what of our co-operation, she said, in regard to the good she accomplished, "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Thy Name give glory." *

Ah! what can we consider in Mary that does not speak to us of her humility? Was not her whole life but a single act of that virtue? Do we not see her, on every occasion, ascribing to God every good and every grace; shunning praise, avoiding distinction, the first to honor her neighbor, while for herself she sought only that humiliation she loved?

"The divine light by which she was enlightened," says St. Theresa, "made her conceive so great an idea of the mystery of God that she could only humble herself in His presence and bless Him for His favors." "However enriched she was by heavenly gifts," adds St. Liguori, "yet she never esteemed herself above any one."

"O wonderful humility of the Virgin!" exclaims St. Bonaventure; "the archangel salutes her as full of grace, announces to her that the Holy Ghost will come upon her; declares to her, in the name of the King of Heaven, that she shall be the mother of God, and assigns to her the highest place among pure creatures; and her only answer is, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord.'"†

She anticipates Elizabeth by saluting her first, and when Elizabeth extolled her faith and prerogatives, she interrupted her to praise God alone, and to attribute to Him the great

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* Ps. cxiii. 1. † St. Luke i. 38.

things done in her as well as those that His power and mercy had accomplished or would accomplish in the revolution of ages.

She does not disdain, or, rather, she esteems it an honor, to be the humble servant of her cousin. "If Elizabeth," says St. Bernard, "was astonished because the exalted Mother of God had come to visit her, how much must that astonishment have been increased when she saw that she came to serve and not to be served!"

Mary observes silence in regard to the gifts she had received from Heaven, leaving men ignorant of her knowledge, her wisdom, her holiness. She conceals even from Joseph the mystery of her divine maternity. The Gospel mentions but a few words of hers, but those express the most profound humility.

Heaven and earth proclaimed to her, by the lips of Gabriel and Elizabeth, "Blessed art thou among women;" * and yet she is only the more careful to avoid every distinction.

She submits without a murmur to be repulsed at Bethlehem, while she sought an asylum for the night in a miserable stable, though she was about to give to the world God, the Saviour. She submits to the law of purification, though it did not apply to her. She desired to go down, if it were possible, to the very lowest depths of abasement to which she saw her divine Son reduced. She exhibits herself associated with him in the humiliations by which He expiates our pride, and, with Him, she will ascend Calvary to share its ignominies, to drink the chalice of His humiliations, to hear herself cursed and villified, and to see herself pointed out as the mother of a criminal.

O most humble and august Virgin, who can worthily celebrate you? "How far," says St. Antoninus, "do you surpass the humility of Abraham when he said of himself,

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* St. Luke i. 28, 42.

'I am dust and ashes,'* and that of John the Baptist, answering the Pharisees, 'I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness!'† But this being so, who can truly say what have been your fruits of grace and salvation!"

"The deeper the valley," says St. Bonaventure, "the more water is it capable of containing; but Mary, through her humility, having abased herself lower than all others, rendered herself more capable of receiving the very fulness of grace." "She was," says St. Bernard, "little in her own eyes, but great in the eyes of the Lord; and if she pleased Him by her purity, it was her humility that made Him choose her for His Mother." Yes, the divine maternity is the fruit of the humility of Mary, as she herself expresses it in these words: "He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid."‡ And thus we may exclaim with St. Liguori, "O humility of Mary! a virtue worthy of all our homage, which, bringing down upon earth the Saviour-God, has opened to us the gates of heaven."

APPLICATION.

Let us labor to acquire the virtue of humility, without which, we may rest entirely assured, there is no true virtue, no possible hope of salvation, for Jesus Christ has said, "Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."§

Let us entertain the most humble sentiments of ourselves, remembering that of ourselves we are nothing but poverty, weakness and sin. Let us, as far as possible, occupy our true position, by humbling ourselves before God and man, and then endeavoring to reproduce in ourselves the humility of which Mary has given us so many examples.

Let us give glory to God for all the good that is in us, or is accomplished through us. Let us shun praise, avoid all singularity, and hide ourselves in the life of our community. Let us know how to sacrifice self-love to obedience, charity, and respect for our neighbor.

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* Gen. xviii. 27. † St. John i. 23. ‡ St. Luke i. 48.
§ St. Matt. xviii. 3.

Let nothing disquiet us. Let us accept with calmness and resignation any coldness, rebuffs, or contempt that may be offered to us, remembering that they can be no more than shadows compared to those of which Jesus and Mary were the objects.

Let modesty characterize our thoughts, our sentiments, and our words. Let us prove that we have but one ambition, that of conforming ourselves entirely, after the example of Mary, to the crucified Redeemer, who is the model of the elect, and thus merit the glory which He has promised to those who, through love for Him, will have persevered to the end in the path of humiliations.

PRAYER.

Most Blessed Virgin, perfect model of all virtues, be blessed for that which, at this moment, I contemplate in you, the sublimity of which ravishes every intelligence. Oh! why do I not imitate Thee by applying myself frankly, resolutely, and without a moment's procrastination, to the practice of true humility. Deign, I beseech thee, O good Mother, to obtain for me the necessary grace to do so. Grant that, through your protection, I may be a faithful disciple of the Divine Master, who has said: "Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart,"* and that those words of your sacred canticle may be fulfilled in me: "He hath exalted the humble." †

* St. Matt. xi. 29. † St. Luke i. 52.

See *Résumés*, page 433.

44.—VIRGINAL PURITY OF MARY.

There is not a spot in thee. — CANT. iv. 7.

CONSIDERATION.

PERFECT purity," says St. Francis de Sales, "is a virtue which belongs, more particularly, to angels than to men, and in which, nevertheless, Mary infinitely surpasses all the heavenly spirits."

Immaculate in her conception, the Most Blessed Virgin ever continued pure, innocent, most holy, or, rather, she never ceased to render herself more and more agreeable to God, infinitely Holy, who though, "in His angels He found wickedness," * yet says to her by the mouth of the wise man, "Thou art all fair, O my love; and there is not a spot in thee."

The heart of Mary was sensible to no pleasures but those which flowed from innocence; it received only the impressions of grace. "There was never found in her," chants the holy Church, "any blemish; she is the splendor of eternal light, and the spotless mirror of the sanctity of God." † As the lily surpasses all other flowers in the grandeur of its height and dazzling whiteness, so virginity surpasses all other virtues in its heavenly aspirations and transcendent beauty. It is in Mary that it shone with all its purest lustre, and exhibited itself adorned with all its divine effulgence.

Mary was the first to make the vow of Virginity. When only three years old, she presented herself in the temple, and consecrated her soul and body to God: a sublime con-

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* Job iv. 18. † Office of the Purity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

secration made with entire liberty and unexampled fervor; a consecration by which she merited the glorious title of "Standard Bearer of Virgins," for she was to be imitated by that multitude of chosen souls whom St. John beheld in Heaven, "clothed with white robes," . . . . "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."*

"O prudent Virgin, O faithful Virgin!" exclaims St. Bernard, "who then imparted to you the knowledge that Virginity was pleasing to the Lord? What law, what moral maxim, what text of the Old Testament commanded, or even counselled you to lead, upon earth, the life of angels? Ah! it was the divine unction that instructed you in all things; it was the Word of God who was about to become your Son, who first became your Teacher, and enlightened your mind before clothing Himself with your flesh. You dedicate yourself to Him as a Virgin, and by that act, although unconsciously, you designate yourself as His Mother; for if God was to be born, it could only be of a Virgin."

"The prerogative of giving birth to the Saviour of the world and the life of all," says St. Ambrose, "was due to Virginity." "Mary," adds St. Anselm, "should render herself like to God, whose Mother she was to become, and unite herself, by her purity, most intimately with Him who is Purity itself." Ah! such was the estimation in which she held that divine virtue, that to preserve it without blemish she would, say the Fathers, have renounced the divine maternity, if it were irreconcilable with the Virginity she had vowed.

With how much reason, then, does the Church honor the virginal purity of Mary by a particular feast, and sing her praises in her hymns! "O Mary," she exclaims, "you are all pure, and always a Virgin without stain; you have become the resplendent gate of Heaven. O happy

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* Apos. vii. 9; xiv. 4.

Mother, beloved Mother of Jesus Christ, receive the pious homage of praise which we offer you. Grant that our hearts and our bodies may be preserved from every stain. Obtain for us, by your prayers, which are always acceptable to your Son, grace for eternity, O Mother full of goodness, our Queen; O Mary, who alone hath always remained without spot or blemish." *

"Thou art blessed and worthy of all veneration, O Virgin Mary, who didst become the Mother of the Saviour, your Virginity remaining without a blemish. † O sovereign protectress of virgins, most pure Mother of God, lily in the midst of thorns, most chaste dove, balm of all our wounds, tower inaccessible to the serpent, defend us from the assaults of the enemy, and, in the midst of the storms that assail us, point out to us the path of safety." ‡

Mary, the model of purity, is also an examplar of all that can assist us in preserving that holy virtue. By her own life, she shows us a certain way in which we shall be safe from the assaults of the malignant serpent.

The holy Virgin allows no sentiments to take possession of her soul but those grand and noble affections which flow from the love of God, zeal for His law, and esteem for His holiness. She gives to God her heart, but she gives Him her whole heart, without reserving any of it for creatures. By prayer, she keeps constantly alive the pure flames of charity, of zeal in pleasing God and none but God.

Although full of grace, and preserved from concupiscence, she still surrounds herself with every precaution, just as if she was capable of incurring any danger. She shuns the world, spends her life in solitude, keeps herself ever in the presence of God, delights in praying to Him, in speaking to Him, in listening to His words of inspiration. She

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* Prose "Inviolata."

† Gradual of the Mass, *Salve Sancta Parens.*

‡ Hymn, Præclara Custos.

carefully guards all her senses, particularly her eyes. "There was in her, even from childhood," say St. Epiphanius and St. John Damascene, "so much modesty, that all who beheld her were filled with astonishment."

"No person holding in his hands a frail vessel, or carrying a lighted lamp in a strong wind, could walk with more circumspection," says St. Gregory of Neocesaria, "than Mary observed in her precautions to preserve and increase the lustre of her Virginity." She practiced mortification in the most perfect degree. "Her abstinence was so great," says St. Ambrose, "that she scarcely ate what was sufficient to sustain her." St. Chrysostom goes even farther, and says, "that her abstinence was excessive, and went beyond the powers of nature." Idleness she especially avoided, while she discharged all the duties of her state with joy, promptness, exactitude, and perseverance.

A faithful virgin, she was, as the Church proclaims in her hymns, more agreeable than any other creature to her Beloved, who takes delight among the lilies; but she was also a prudent Virgin, avoiding absolutely everything calculated to lead to sin, and employing every means prescribed or counselled for the preservation of this holy virtue, which means are comprised in vigilance and prayer, according to those words of Jesus Christ: "Watch ye and pray that ye enter not into temptation." *

APPLICATION.

Let us honor Mary under the glorious title of "Virgin of virgins." Ah! if the Holy Ghost has said, "Oh how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory! for the memory thereof is immortal; because it is known both with God and with men," † in what terms can we worthily celebrate the praise of the holy Virgin, who shines with a lustre so far exceeding that of all pure souls!

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* St. Matt. xxvi. 41. † Wisdom, iv. 1.

Yes, let us glorify her as the worthy temple of the thrice-holy God; but, above all, let us strive to imitate her, keeping before our minds our obligations in this regard as Christians, as Religious, and as Teachers.

Let us watch and pray. Let us mortify the spirit, the heart, and the senses. Let us not suffer the imagination to suggest dangerous objects, the heart to become attracted to creatures, or the eyes to rest upon anything that may bring danger to the soul. Let us avoid, with the greatest care and at every cost, everything that might be an occasion not of sin only, but even of temptation.

Let our hearts be ever occupied with such thoughts as are most likely to inspire the love of the virtue of purity. Let us always remember that we stand in the presence of God and of our Guardian Angel; let us remember our last end, our dignity as Christians, the Passion and death of Jesus Christ. Let us cling closely to that Divine Saviour, the source of all purity, and partake frequently and fervently of the Bread of Life. Let us cherish a sincere and affectionate devotion to Mary. In all our temptations let us fervently and confidently have recourse to that august Virgin. She is all-powerful with God, and, in her compassion and goodness, she will exercise her power to defend us against the enemy of our souls, to baffle his wiles, and to convert his attacks into occasions of glorifying God and increasing our merits for salvation.

PRAYER.

Most Blessed Virgin, Chaste Dove, Beloved of the Holy of Holies, you know, alas! how many souls vice has plunged and still plunges into hell! Ah! be my shield against the temptations which assail me. I desire, on each occasion of trial, to invoke your holy name, crying aloud, "Mary, O my Mother, help me!" Oh deign, then, to help me whenever temptation assails, so that, through your powerful protection, my soul may escape all the tempests of hell, and finally reach the haven of safety. Amen.

See *Résumés*, page 433.

45.—OBEDIENCE OF MARY.

Behold the handmaid of the Lord.—ST. LUKE i. 38.

CONSIDERATION.

PREORDAINED to be the first among the elect, the co-operatrix in the work of our redemption, the most perfect image of Jesus Christ, the most faultless model to present to the faithful in every condition, Mary, under all these titles, must practice and did practice the most perfect obedience.

Filled with the greatness of God and of His sovereign empire over all creation, from the moment of her immaculate conception, she rendered Him an homage of submission more excellent than that offered Him by the angels when they came forth from His creating hand, and even at the moment of their trial. She offered to Him the sacrifice of her own will, of which, says St. Thomas of Villanova, she always knew how to make an entire abnegation in order to obey Him. She could, therefore, constantly say and repeat those words which her divine Son was to utter: "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, that I may perfect His work." *

The new Eve, co-operating with the new Adam in repairing the transgression of the first woman, and the innumerable evils it entailed upon the human family, she fulfilled, in the most perfect manner, the beneficent designs of God; she wished only what He wished and as He wished it. Contemplating our Most Blessed Mother from this stand-point, St. John Damascene exclaims, "Happy obedience of Mary, which has repaired the evils of the disobedience of Eve, which has triumphed over the malignant serpent and procured immortality for man."

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* St. John iv. 34.

Co-redemptrix of the human race, gloriously triumphing over that fallen spirit, the dispositions of whose will are expressed in these words, "I will not serve," * she was, of all creatures, the most submissive to the will of God, so much so indeed, that her whole life may be summed up in those few words, the exact opposite of "I will not serve," "Behold the handmaid of the Lord."

She aspired to nothing more ardently than to form herself more and more to the resemblance of her divine Son, of that God of humiliation and suffering of whom the Apostle was to say, "He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." † Illumined by the divine light of faith, she penetrated more deeply than any other into the wonderful mysteries of the Incarnate Word, "taking the form of a servant," ‡ being obedient to her and St. Joseph during thirty years, becoming the servant of all, offering to His Father the sacrifice of His will before offering Him the sacrifice of His life, dying after having spoken the words, "All is consummated." § . . . It was for this reason she desired for herself the most absolute submission to all those whom it pleased divine Providence to place in authority over her.

She obeyed through motives of religion, and for objects in the supernatural order. She obeyed through grace and under the impulse of the Holy Ghost, so that she might please God, imitate the divine Saviour, and keep all His pre-

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* Jer. ii. 20. † Philipp. ii. 8. ‡ Ibid. 7.

§ St. John xix. 30.

cepts and counsels. In the depositaries of His authority, she saw God Himself, no matter how inferior to herself they might be in dignity and grace; and for the sake of God she submitted herself wholly to their will and judgment.

Her obedience was constant. Endowed with a more perfect liberty than that of Adam and Eve before their fall, and that of the angels on the day of their creation, she used it from the moment of her immaculate conception to that of her death, only to subject herself, without reserve, to the will of the Most High, and for His sake to those He had placed over her.

St. Joachim and St. Anne she obeyed as never child obeyed its parents. In the temple she was the admiration of her companions by the punctuality she observed in the discharge of every duty.

Having become the spouse of Joseph, she honored and respected him, and made it her happiness to anticipate his every wish.

In the last years of her life she showed herself, among the flock of the divine Shepherd, the most docile to the voice of the Church, uttered by its Supreme Head or by those who were united with Him in the mission of teaching nations.

Mary obeyed all those who were placed in authority over her, and she obeyed them in all things, however difficult or repugnant to her natural feelings they might be, provided what was enjoined her to do was not contrary to the law of God. She obeyed promptly and exactly. "Never," says St. Bernard, "was there any delay or hesitation on her part. She showed herself ready, at all times, to receive the impressions of grace." "Her soul," adds St. Liguori, "was like fused metal, ready to take whatever form it might please God to give it." When, for example, she received the order to flee into Egypt, there was no hesitation on her part; like her holy spouse, she sees, in this order, but one thing, and that the obligation of doing what was commanded, and immediately it is executed.

Mary subjects her judgment, her will, and her affections to holy obedience. She has no will but to do the will of God, and that at any risk. In her most bitter trials, she is wholly resigned to His Divine pleasure. She never utters a word indicating a desire to put any limit to her obedience, or tending to modify, in the slightest degree, the orders that she receives. She obeys with love and through love, and manifests in every way that nothing is more agreeable to her than to execute the orders she receives, no matter how painful or repugnant to her nature.

Ah! we fall short of the reality in speaking of the obedience of Mary, for, by the power of the Holy Ghost dwelling within her, the more painful the order, the more delight she felt in executing it: her obedience was generous. She first performed all the duties that were obligatory in her state, but she did not stop there; she advanced to what was most perfect. Thus, though resting under no obligation, she submitted her Son to the law of circumcision, and herself to that of purification.

Yes, O Holy Virgin, the virtue of obedience shines resplendently throughout your whole life; and, in whatever circumstances we behold you, you always appear to our eyes fully realizing and exemplifying those glorious words of thine: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord."

APPLICATION.

"Oh! how the example of Mary," says Francis de Sales, "ought to lead us to the most absolute and submissive obedience, not only in regard to what is commanded, but also to such things as are simply of counsel. Servants of that Most Holy Virgin, let us do honor to her by practicing the holy virtue of obedience, and thus rendering ourselves pleasing in the eyes of God, and rich in merits for Heaven.

But above all, let us imitate her, remembering that, as Religious and children of obedience, we have every motive for doing so.

Let us now examine ourselves, and see what is our conduct in this regard. Do we obey, in the spirit of faith, with a view solely to the glory of God, who is the source of all authority? Do we obey constantly and in everything commanded? Do our self-love, our personal preferences, or the influence of others put any limits to our obedience?

Let us obey at once, exactly, and without question. Is our obedience an obedience of the judgment and the will? Is it a cheerful obedience, proceeding from the heart, and making us execute every order with joy? Is it a general obedience, extending beyond the strict obligations of conscience, and causing us to esteem it a happiness to have an occasion of making a sacrifice.

Like Mary, let us be perfect in our obedience; then, as St. Liguori tells us, we shall please her in a special manner; we shall experience with her, and all the saints, that God is good toward His servants; that He does not suffer Himself to be surpassed in generosity; and that, even in this life, but more especially in the next, He will accomplish in our regard those words of Holy Scripture: "An obedient man shall speak of victory." *

PRAYER.

O glorious Queen of angels, who wast content to call thyself "handmaid of the Lord," obtain for us a share of thy admirable dispositions of humility and obedience. Grant that, through your intercession, O good Mother, inspired by faith, we may see God in the persons placed over us in authority, and faithfully observe all that they command. We know that it is by living thus we shall draw down upon

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* Prov. xxi. 28.

ourselves an abundance of heavenly graces and merit, one day, to be admitted into that celestial abode where, with you, we shall forever praise that God whose will we shall have done on earth.

See *Résumés*, page 434.

46. — THE POVERTY OF MARY.

I know thy tribulation and thy poverty, but thou art rich. — APOC. ii. 9.

CONSIDERATION.

MARY was poor in the goods of this world, and that condition, owing to her holy dispositions, was to her a fruitful source of every grace, so that the Lord could say of her more truly than of any other creature, "I know thy tribulation and thy poverty, but thou art rich."

Ah! it was because docile to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, which led her to the most perfect sanctity, she practiced in advance the renouncement of the world, to which the Divine Master was afterward to invite so many of the faithful, when He would say to them, "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast and give to the poor, . . . and come follow me." * It was because by the light of faith and reason she clearly comprehended the utter nothingness, as well as the danger, of the goods of this world, which are so false, so perishable, so uncertain, which bring with them so many disquietudes and distractions, which so easily lead us into the ways of pride and injustice. It was because, as she herself revealed to St. Bridget, she considered them as contemptible dross.

On the other hand, she also knew what spiritual advantages the state of poverty offers; how many and precious are the occasions it presents to the soul of showing to God that we love Him for Himself alone, and of otherwise acquiring merit in His eyes. Had she not the example of Job before her eyes, who, in the midst of his afflictions, gave so much glory to God, and thus drew upon Himself so many blessings; and did she not desire to enter upon and follow the road that leads to perfection?

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* St. Matt. xix. 21.

Yes, we have only to consider the dispositions of her immaculate heart to be persuaded that, detached from every affection to creatures, she esteemed and desired spiritual riches alone, and that, even from the first use of reason, she could say, with more justice than those saints who were most detached from the world, "My God and my all;" * "O Lord, let me possess your love and your grace, and I am sufficiently rich." † "Placing all her joy in God alone," says St. Liguori, "she sought no other than the Sovereign Good."

Her love of poverty was carried to the very highest degree by the example and works of her Divine Son. Ah! when she beheld the King of kings born in a stable, with a crib for His cradle, swaddling-clothes for His covering, and inviting poor shepherds to be His first worshippers; when she saw Him afterward, earning, with St. Joseph, His daily bread with the sweat of His brow; when she gazed upon Him without a shelter to cover His head, so that He could say, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head;" ‡ when she heard Him beautify poverty, and denounce "Wo to you that are rich;" § and when, above all, she contemplated Him on Mount Calvary, drinking so deeply of the very dregs of poverty that He could not obtain a drop of water, and dying, after having seen His

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* St. Francis of Assisium.

† St. Ignatius of Loyola.

‡ St. Matt. viii. 20.

§ St. Luke vi. 24.

garments distributed by lot, she desired that poverty should be her inseparable companion, as it had been that of her Divine Son, and that it should accompany her in all the same characteristics in which it ever attended Him.

With what perfection did the Most Blessed Virgin practice this virtue? According to many writers, she made a solemn vow of poverty. "I made in my infancy," she said to St. Bridget, "a vow to possess nothing in this world. All that I could procure I gave to the poor, reserving for myself only what was indispensable for my necessary support."

She endured many privations, and there is no doubt that she often found herself without the necessaries of life; but nothing could shake her resignation, or disturb her tranquillity of soul. In whatever form, or under whatever circumstances, poverty forced upon her its rigorous hardships, she remained equally calm and joyful, occupying herself only with the one great thought of adoring, even from the depths of her poverty, the Lord of heaven and earth, and of extolling and praising His divine providence.

In her garments and in her humble dwelling she was poor; she was poor in her daily food, which, according to St. Ambrose, was very plain and simple, barely sufficient to support life, though not enough to gratify the appetite.

Trampling under foot all the vain prejudices of the world, she was not ashamed to appear poor in the eyes of men. Hence she did not disdain espousal with a poor mechanic; no blush of false pride mantled her cheek on the day of her purification, when she presented the usual offering of the poor. Poverty has its humiliations, sometimes very bitter, and sometimes very hard to endure; but in this the Most Blessed Virgin only found additional motives to love it the more. Thus when, with her holy spouse, she saw herself repulsed, at every door, in Bethlehem, on account of her poverty, she only made it the occasion of praising God.

When Jesus Christ was dying, He could have committed the Blessed Virgin to disciples who were rich in the goods of this world, such as Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, Zacheus, or Lazarus; but He does not do so because, according to St. Augustine, He does not wish to thwart her inclinations and purposes to be, and to appear, poor. He leaves her to the care of John, a poor fisherman of the Lake of Tiberius, who, like the other apostles, forsook all to follow Him.

The poverty of Mary was active and laborious. Ah! the most glorious Virgin fully understood that slothful poverty is a crime, and hence she never ceased to labor, both to supply her wants and the wants of those whom she was accustomed to relieve. This she always did without undue solicitude, trusting with filial confidence in a kind Providence for all that did not depend on her own efforts.

We see, then, that Mary presents herself to us as a perfect model of evangelical poverty. That in this respect, as in all others, she proves herself the worthy Mother of the divine Master, who, born in a stable, spent His life without a home, and destitute of all the goods of this world, and died on a cross, bereft of everything, after having bequeathed to His disciples, as a heritage, this maxim, so opposite to the prejudices of the world, "Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." *

APPLICATION.

Let us follow our good Mother in the way she has gone before us. Let us be poor not only exteriorly, by possessing nothing of our own, but also interiorly, by being delighted with our poverty, "for," says St. Bernard, "it is not sufficient to be in a state of poverty: we must love that state."

Let us support with joy, or at least with resignation, the hardships of poverty when Providence permits that we

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* St. Luke vi. 20.

should experience them. In such trials, let us remember that Jesus and Mary were often in a state of utter destitution, and under circumstances much more painful than any in which we can find ourselves placed. Let our destitution, of whatever nature it may be, only serve to prove our patience and our love of sacrifice.

Let us go further, and, for the purpose of honoring and imitating Jesus and Mary in their poverty, let us impose on ourselves (so far as obedience permits us), some voluntary privations to show that we love poverty and that we truly embrace and practice it.

Let us be industrious, truly devoted to the work confided to us, discharging each duty with constancy, energy, and judgment, so that we shall not only not be a burden to any one, but that we may contribute, in our appropriate sphere of duty, in procuring for our community all the advantages it may need for its support.

Let no murmur or complaint ever escape our lips, on account of any privations we may have to undergo, or any labors we may be called on to perform to assist in our support. Let us elevate our thoughts until they are in one accord with the spirit of the Gospel, and, by this standard, let us judge of the circumstances in which we may be placed. Let us keep our eyes steadily fixed on Mary, suffering and toiling, and say to ourselves, "Since I wish to arrive at the happy Mansions where my good Mother awaits me, must I not follow the same path which conducted her there?"

PRAYER.

Be ever honored, O wise and prudent Virgin, who, comprehending the vanity and danger of worldly riches, aspired only to possess those imperishable riches of Heaven. Be praised and blessed, because, docile to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, you chose, as your inheritance, poverty and its hardships, in order that you might render yourself more pleasing to God and still more worthy of His extraordinary favors. Oh! obtain for us, we beseech you, the grace that we may faithfully walk in your footsteps until death. Give us a place among your followers, O Sovereign Queen, and detach our hearts from the things of this world, so that our affections may be wholly centred on the riches of Eternity.

See *Résumés*, page 434.

47. — MARY THE MODEL OF GRATITUDE.

He that is mighty hath done great things to me. — ST. LUKE i. 49.

CONSIDERATION.

GRATITUDE is a virtue by which, appreciating a favor, we sincerely bless the person from whom it comes, and devote ourselves to his service. This virtue is the distinctive characteristic of upright souls, and is ever united with sentiments of justice, humility, and religion, from which, in reality, it flows. Ah! from this alone is it not manifest that Mary was a perfect model of this virtue? Who, in truth, ever loved justice as she whom the Church calls "Mirror of Justice"? Who ever so humble as she, who, being Mother of God, desired no other title than "handmaid of the Lord"? In what heart did religion ever hold such absolute sway as in that of her who, alone of all creatures, was never, for a moment, subject to any influence save that of the Holy Ghost, and was subject to it absolutely, entirely.

From the very first moment of her existence the immaculate Virgin elevated her soul to God, and blessed Him for His goodness to her, exclaiming, in the transports of her love: "It is just and reasonable to give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, who hast preserved me from the power of hell, and loaded me with favors." These dispositions she preserved, or, rather, she advanced in them during her infancy and youth. Did she not daily see victims of thanksgiving offered up in the temple? Did she not continually hear hymns of praise chanted, and did she not herself join in the heavenly chorus? Did she not unite in celebrating the numerous feasts by which the children of Israel gave praises to the Lord for the protection He gave to His chosen people? No, we cannot doubt that she entered, with her whole soul, into the spirit of divine worship, of which so large a part was devoted to express gratitude to God.

But who can conceive how much this virtue was developed in the Blessed Virgin from the moment of the incarnation of the Word? Ah! when she considered how the Lord had "regarded the humility of His handmaid," to what dignity He had raised her in choosing her for His Mother; when she saw His wonderful mercy to man, in whose salvation she took so deep an interest; when she measured, so to speak, the abyss to which the Son of God descended in becoming the Son of man, to ransom from the power of hell the unhappy posterity of Adam, it could not be but that her heart would be overwhelmed with admiration and love, and that she would send up to Heaven the most fervent prayers of gratitude and thanks.

It was the same in all the different mysteries of the life of our Saviour, all of which spoke so eloquently of the goodness and liberality of God toward her and the whole human family; and, on every occasion, and with the most perfect dispositions, she said, in union with her divine Son, "Father, I give thee thanks, . . . because thou hast loved me before the foundation of the world." *

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* St. John xi. 41; xvii. 24.

No, never did gratitude to God, on the part of any other creature, approach to the same degree that it reached in Mary. Ah! were it given us to know the acts and the words by which she gave expression to that sentiment! What hymns of benediction and praise arose from the lips of the glorious Virgin toward Him who had enriched her with so many favors! And here let us recall the evidence of this, which we find recorded in the gospel.

At the moment when Elizabeth, inspired by the Holy Ghost, celebrates the greatness of Mary, and proclaims her blessed among women, this divine Mother interrupts her with those words which are the most sublime expression of ardent gratitude: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. . . . Because He that is mighty hath done great things to me, and holy is His name. . . . His mercy is from generation to generations to them that fear Him. . . . He hath received Israel, his servant, being mindful of his mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and his seed forever."* What sublime words! What heavenly transports! What an admiration of the works of God! What an eulogy of His power and goodness!

The gratitude of Mary, so pure in its source, so beautiful in its expression, was universal in its object. She praised God for His favors and graces to herself personally, as well as for all those He had dispensed, and would thereafter dispense, to man. She blessed Him for all His favors in the natural order, but more so for those in the order of grace; she blessed Him in her own name, and on behalf of the whole human family, whose interpreter she had become; she praised Him in Himself; she blessed Him in the angels, and in all those who were the instruments of His divine providence in her regard.

The gratitude of Mary was also constant and expansive.

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* St. Luke i. 46–55.

It continually increased as the favors which called it forth were augmented. What fruits, then, must it have produced! Oh! how many new favors, not less precious than those for which she returned thanks, did this virtue draw down upon her! How much did her appreciation of the favors of God, and her gratitude in thanking Him for them, conduce to maintain and develop in her the fire of His holy love, devotedness for His glory, zeal for His worship, and, at the same time, charity for all men, in whom she saw His representatives, and toward whom she discharged, so far as she was able, the debt she owed to God for His mercy and munificence.

APPLICATION.

Let us admire, extol, and glorify the most sacred heart of Mary, because it is the centre of the noblest, the grandest, and the most elevated sentiments. Let us labor, with the assistance of divine grace, to form our hearts on that incomparable model, and to imitate, so far as we are able, the sentiments of gratitude which so pre-eminently characterized it. Yes, let us endeavor to excite that virtue in our soul, and to reproduce it with the characteristics which distinguished it in the soul of our good Mother. On the one hand, let us consider our own nothingness, our depraved passions, and our sins; on the other, the goodness, the solicitude, the liberality of God toward us. Ah! how can we meditate on these two points without being filled with astonishment and admiration, and shedding tears of gratitude and love! No, no; let us not be guilty of ingratitude to God. Let us rather, with hearts burning with tender devotion, bless that good Father, who has for us so lively and generous an affection. To this end, let us unite with Jesus Christ, the victim of thanksgiving on our altars, and with Mary, who, in heaven even more than on earth, celebrates, in the name of all creatures, the mercies of God.

Let our lives be one unbroken act of thanksgiving, since the favors which call forth our gratitude are continually accumulating. Let us dedicate ourselves to the glory of God. Let us seize every opportunity of discharging, as far as possible, the debt we owe to His sovereign goodness. Let us never forget that He has placed within our power the means of doing so, by the exercise of charity toward our neighbor, since, for us, our neighbor represents God Himself. Let it be our chief aim and our first duty, as teachers, to train up our pupils in sentiments of gratitude to God, to the Church, and to society, to their parents, and to all their other benefactors.

Oh ! what merits will we acquire for ourselves by pursuing this course ! With what consolation will it inundate our souls ! What new graces will it procure for us ! How much will it aid us on our journey to heaven ! With what confidence will it inspire us of being admitted into that haven of rest with Mary, the angels, and the saints, who glorify God by singing, without ceasing, an endless hymn of eternal gratitude.

PRAYER.

I am but dust and ashes, nothingness, misery, and sin, and yet, O my good Mother, I see myself the object of the predilection of God, who, treating me as His privileged child, lavishes upon me, without measure, proofs of His tenderness. Oh deign, I beseech Thee, to bless God for me, and exalt His generosity and goodness.

O Holy Virgin, perfect model of gratitude, how ardently I desire to reproduce in my soul that virtue with the same characteristics that distinguished it in yours. O grant that, through your intercession, this desire may be realized, so that, having praised the Lord in this life for His merciful favors, I may be found worthy to be received into the mansions of everlasting glory, where, with you, I may glorify and praise Him forever and ever.

See *Résumés*, page 435.

48.—MARY THE MODEL OF PATIENCE.

Patience hath a perfect work.—ST. JAMES i. 4.

CONSIDERATION.

PATIENCE, as defined by St. Bonaventure, is tranquillity and silence in our sufferings. It consists not only in abstaining from complaint and murmuring, but also in banishing from our minds and hearts every thought and feeling that might proceed from a want of resignation. This virtue is absolutely necessary for us in this valley of struggles and tears in which trials follow each other in constant succession; where suffering presents itself under so many forms, seizes upon us in so many different ways, and does not leave our side, so to speak, from the cradle to the grave. Hence the saints were all thoroughly exercised in patience, and practiced it in a most eminent degree. But there is no one in whom it shone so brilliantly as in the Most Blessed Virgin, which caused St. Liguori to exclaim, "God proposes Mary to us as a model of all virtues, but in a special manner as the model of patience."

Ah! it was because, through the grace which she possessed in its fulness, Mary understood that if God is pleased to try us by affliction, it is to exercise and perfect our virtue and increase our merits for heaven; it is to give us an opportunity of showing that we desire to belong to Him for Himself, and not solely for ourselves; that we wish to serve Him for His own sake, and not because of His favors. And hence Mary herself was perfectly resigned to all the sufferings with which it pleased Divine Providence to visit her.

She remembered that it was at the moment when the Lord was felicitating Himself on the fidelity of Job that

Satan answered, "Is it astonishing that man fears you, when you have heaped favors on him?" and she accepted the trial of suffering: "I will bless the Lord at all times: His praise shall be always in my mouth;" * and if in adversity I shall find the means of offering Him a more agreeable homage, I resign myself to it — I desire it — I most ardently ask for it.

From her birth she was disposed to suffer everything for God, and to say, with even still more resignation than Job, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away." "Blessed be the name of the Lord: if we have received good things at the hand of the Lord, why should we not receive evil?" †

But how much were these dispositions developed in her heart from the moment of the Incarnation of the Word? Ah! when she saw the God of angels, the Eternal, subjecting Himself to suffering and death; when she beheld Him suffering at Bethlehem, suffering in Egypt, suffering at Nazareth; when, above all, she saw Him crowned with thorns, laden with His cross, and then nailed to the ignominious tree, and enduring, at the same time, all the tortures of body, mind, and heart, she could not, in her desire to resemble Him, wish for anything else than to suffer with Him, and to suffer without consolation; than to regard and welcome adversity as a friend, a companion from whom she ought not to be separated.

Mary is resigned to suffering, but she is wholly resigned. There is not in her conduct the slightest shadow of those protestations of slighted self-love; of those secret repinings; of those disquietudes of mind frequently so deep-seated; of that proneness to discouragement; of any of that train of imperfections which are the deplorable consequences of the repugnance of our nature to everything that contradicts or opposes it. She accepts suffering as coming from

* Ps. xxxiii. 2. † Job i. 21; ii. 10.

God. Whatever her sufferings may be, she turns toward Him, and places no dependence on herself or on human aid. Never do her lips utter a complaint or a reproach; never does her heart yield to the slightest feeling of resentment. Her whole life was passed in the midst of tribulations. She suffered at Nazareth, in Bethlehem, in Egypt, in Jerusalem. She suffered from heat and cold, hunger and thirst, rebuff and mockery, abandonment, isolation, and exile. She suffered in her senses, in her soul, in her heart. She suffered for the infant Church, and, greater than all, for her adorable Son. So much did she suffer that of her it is said, "Your sorrow, O Virgin daughter of Sion, is great as the sea;" * and the Church represents her as uttering those other words of the Lamentations; "O all ye that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow." †

"In the same sense," says St. Liguori, "that Jesus is called King of martyrs, because He suffered more than all the martyrs together, so should Mary be proclaimed Queen of martyrs, for she has acquired that title by sufferings the greatest, next to those of her Divine Son, ever endured by a creature." "The passion and death of our Saviour," says he, in another place, "suffice to make her a martyr of patience. Her presence at the scenes of Calvary completes, in a most wonderful manner, the sacrifice of resignation which she offered up during her whole life." Let us contemplate her standing at the foot of the cross; her heart is plunged in an abyss of sorrow, yet she is firm, calm, resolute, not ceasing for a moment to adore and praise the Heavenly Father, in union with the Divine Victim who offers Himself up for His glory and the salvation of the world.

The heroism of her courage surpasses the greatness of her sufferings. If the Christian ages were to produce souls

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* Lament. ii. 13. † Lament. i. 12.

not only resigned, but desirous of suffering, and who, like St. Theresa, would beg "either to die or to suffer," or who, like St. Francis Xavier, would exclaim, "Still more suffering, O Lord," we cannot doubt that Mary possessed these dispositions in a still more perfect degree, even when the bitter chalice presented to her surpassed in bitterness that of all the saints together.

Oh! how much, then, does she deserve to be exalted for her patience, by which she has exhibited to us the effects of divine grace in the soul burdened with affliction. If, as St. Chrysostom says, "to suffer for the love of God is more glorious than to work miracles," what must be the crown of glory that Mary has received, who, purely for the love of God, endured sufferings compared with which those of all other creatures seem as nothing.

APPLICATION.

Let us honor Mary as the model of patience and resignation, and strive to imitate her. Like her, let us look upon our trials with the eyes of faith; let us consider them as designed by God for our greater good, or as a punishment for our sins, or as occasions brought about by Providence to enable us to achieve a victory over our self-love, to testify the sincerity of our love for God, to be to us a source of precious merits for heaven, and to make us advance in a spiritual life.

When we are in tribulation, let us have recourse to Mary, whom the Church calls "Comfortress of the afflicted," and let us beg her assistance. Then let us turn our eyes to the God of Calvary. Ah! contemplating such a picture, can discouragement find a lodgment in our souls!

Nothing is of so much importance in this life as to know how to suffer. For this reason, our divine Saviour constantly recommends the virtue of patience, saying to us: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me."* To want resignation, is to act in a manner unbecoming a disciple of that divine Saviour. Let us, then, be patient, and show it forth in our conduct; and this applies, in an especial manner, to us, Religious and teachers, who have embraced the practice of the Evangelical counsels, for we cannot bring forth the fruits of salvation among the young unless we aspire to excel in patience.

Yes, like Mary, let us know how to suffer; let us accept affliction as the messenger of God, and, whatever it may be, let us preserve tranquillity of soul, repeating the sublime words of our venerable founder in his afflictions: "Blessed be God." Let us think of the "weight of glory"† that our sufferings here below will merit for us, if we bear them as true Christians, and, finally, let us never forget that the cross is our salvation,‡ and that it is by following the royal road of the cross that we shall reach eternal life.

PRAYER.

O Mary, my Queen, if, all innocence as thou wert, thou still desiredst to suffer, should I dare to rebel against suffering, I who am so great a sinner, and have so often merited eternal torments! O Queen of Martyrs, obtain for me the grace to imitate you; to be, by my invincible patience, a source of edification to my Brothers and pupils; courageously to seize the cross which your divine Son offers, and faithfully to walk in His footsteps, until that cross shall have opened to me the gates of the city of the elect.

See *Résumés*, page 435.

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* St. Luke ix. 23. † 2 Cor. iv. 17.

‡ Imit. of Christ: Book II., chap. xii. 2.

49. — MARY THE MODEL OF FERVOR.

In spirit fervent, serving the Lord. — ROM. xii. 11.

CONSIDERATION.

UNDER whatever light we consider fervor, it shines, with all its lustre, in the Most Holy Virgin, in whom, says St. Jerome, all the virtues faultlessly flourished, and shed around her a most delicious perfume.

Fervor is the love of God acting in our hearts, leading us to God with all the power of our being, and uniting us with that supreme good, who alone is our happiness and peace. And did not that love act with all its power in the heart of Mary, the "Mother of fair love?" Did it not inflame her heart with all its divine fire? Did it not determine all her actions?

Oh! who can conceive what the immaculate Virgin has accomplished through her love for God! What were the transports of her soul toward that uncreated Beauty, who was the only object of her affections! What care did she take to keep her mind and her heart continually raised to God! — to think of God, to desire God, to love God! Such was the occupation of her whole life, according to St. Thomas of Villanova, or rather such was her life itself.

Fervor is the prompt, entire, and generous devotion of the heart to God and His service. Did not this devotion exist in Mary in its most heroic form? Endowed, from the very first moment of her life, with the greatest actual grace, and gifted with a sublime knowledge of God, she immediately and entirely fixed her heart upon Him, never to be separated from Him, and constantly repeated, I am ready, O my God, to do your will: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word."*

Her soul was like an orchard watered by a limpid and ever-flowing stream, in which the trees were not only adorned with verdure and flowers, but laden with delicious fruit, and in which the Lord of the manor ever took the greatest delight. All the virtues were centred in her, and they were always in living action. The Most High had entrusted to her many talents, and she employed them in such a manner that the Divine Master, fully satisfied with her stewardship, placed her over all creation.

No creature was ever endowed with so many graces, and every grace produced its own fruit. In all things this glorious Virgin had but one object before her, and that was to please and glorify God. She gave Him all she had with a willing heart, and with but one regret, and that sprang from her inability to give Him more.

With a soul overflowing with generosity, she not only did not allow herself to be checked by difficulties, but she found in those very difficulties a motive for doing more good than God required of her. With what strength of will did she devote herself to the practice of the sublimest virtues, and to surmount every obstacle that might lie in her way! Let us remember that at the age of only three years she forsakes everything to consecrate herself to God in the temple. And, above all, let us remember that she followed her Divine Son to Calvary, and that she remained there, like a rock, in the midst of an ocean of sorrows whose furious billows were all dashed upon her.

Ah! if by fervor we understand energy in the performance of good, Mary is, then, the model of the most consummate fervor, and she is equally such if we understand by fervor the spirit of prayer, the unction of piety, and a relish for the things of God.

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* St. Luke i. 38.

Was not her immaculate heart the temple, the heaven of the Holy Ghost? Did she not submit herself to His divine influence? Was she not consumed by the fire of charity? And what other attraction could draw her heart from prayer, from the contemplation of God and His works, and from uniting with that Sovereign Good who can alone satisfy all her desires?

"Mary is, of all creatures," says St. Liguori, "the one that has most entirely fulfilled the precept of our divine Saviour: "We ought always to pray and not to faint."* Her prayer was continued and persevering from the first moment of her life to the last. She was, moreover, entirely recollected and free from every distraction. Her soul was raised to the mansions of God, where the tumults of earth cannot enter. Nothing could turn her aside from her fervor to God.

Prayer was her delight, and no moments were more precious to her than those which she could consecrate to it. She prayed with such fervor and holy energy that she could not fail to be an object of admiration to the cherubim and the heavenly hosts. She repeated the holy words in which the patriarchs, the judges, and the prophets had praised the Lord; but even these words failed fully to express her sentiments of adoration, gratitude, and love. The language that her lips uttered fell short of the fervent breathings of her heart, whose transports of piety and love were really ineffable.

She was the first to whom these words of Jesus Christ could be applied: "The true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and in truth."† She adored Him through His Eternal Son, whose Mother she had become, and to whom she was united by the closest and most indissoluble bonds.

Oh! who can tell, Most Blessed Virgin, what were your prayers when you possessed in your sacred womb, or when you clasped to your heart, the Divine Mediator, and when, through Him, you implored the Father whom we have in heaven on behalf of mankind? Who can say what were your prayers at the moment when, as priest and victim, He offered Himself up, before your eyes, for the redemption of the world, or, later, when you assisted at the holy sacrifice of the altar, which is a renewal of that of Calvary, and when, by communion, your heart was merged anew in His adorable heart? Yes, your prayers were divine prayers, for such was your union with Jesus that it was Jesus who prayed in you and through you.

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* St. Luke xviii. 1. † St. John iv. 23.

APPLICATION.

Let us honor Mary as the model of fervor; with the Church, let us salute her with the title of "Vessel of singular devotion."

Let us congratulate that Virgin, wise by pre-eminence, in keeping her lamp always lighted and supplied with oil until the arrival of the heavenly Spouse.

Let us endeavor to imitate her; let us remember that fervor is the health, the vigor, of the soul; that, with fervor, everything is done well and easily, while, without it, everything languishes, withers, and dies.

Let us have nothing more at heart—and this applies more especially to us Religious—than to acquire, preserve, and increase this holy disposition, so precious and so necessary.

Like Mary, let us draw fervor from its only true source. Let us be faithful to the grace which points out to us what is good, and incites us to perform it: let us co-operate with divine grace in fully accomplishing it. Let us not resist the voice of the Holy Ghost, and the impulses He gives to our heart, but let us obey Him with that good will which He so much desires to find in us.

Let us frequently recall to mind the presence of the

Master whom we serve, and the qualities that should characterize the service we render Him. Let us maintain the strictest union with our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the fire of charity is diffused throughout our soul. Let us keep that divine flame burning with the fuel of sacrifice, that is to say, by the practice of mortification.

Let us perform well all our spiritual exercises, and particularly our meditations. Let us never forget that this is the fundamental feature of a religious life. With St. Theresa, let us say, "Whatever it may cost me, I will always follow the way of prayer, for it is a delusion to think of going to God by any other road."

Like Mary, let us frequently meditate on the mysteries of the divine Infancy; on the hidden life; on the public life, and on the death of Jesus Christ, and our souls will possess no other wish than to be all and forever for Him who has been all for us.

PRAYER.

You are, O Mary, by your holy life, a model of fervor, worthy the homage, the honor, and the veneration of Heaven and earth; but you are also, through your intercession, a means by which we may become fervent. Vouchsafe, we beseech you, to supplicate your divine Son in our behalf, so that you may obtain for us the grace of accomplishing the work of God with love, courage, constancy, and devotedness; and that, having fulfilled all the duties of our holy state, we may be admitted to that heavenly happiness which God has reserved as the recompense of our feeble efforts.

See *Résumés*, page 436.

50.—MARY THE MODEL OF A HIDDEN LIFE.

I . . . will lead her into the wilderness, and I will speak to her heart.—OSEE ii. 14.

CONSIDERATION.

THE Lord has, at all times, called into solitude those souls which He has predestined for extraordinary merits, and has said to them, through the grace of their vocation, the words which He addressed to Abraham: "Go forth out of thy country . . . . and out of thy Father's house, and come into the land which I shall show thee." * Thus it was with Moses, Samuel, Elias, Eliseus, St. John the Baptist, the Apostles, so far as it did not interfere with the public functions of their ministry, and with that army of the elect that peopled the desert, which they caused to blossom and flourish with the most admirable virtues.

But this was the case, in a still higher degree, with the Most Blessed Virgin, toward whom the Lord had the greatest and the most wonderful designs. In her regard, He designed to fulfil the words of the Prophet Osee, "I will allure her, and will lead her into the wilderness, and I will speak to her heart," and He, therefore, called her to consecrate herself to Him in the temple. Docile to his voice, she answers, "Behold, I come. . . . In the head of the book it is written of me that I shall do thy will." † "I will come into thy house, I will worship toward thy holy temple," ‡ and there I will dwell all the days of my life.

At a later period, it is true, holy obedience made her leave the temple, preparatory to her espousal with St.

*** Gen. xii. 1. † Ps. xxxix. 8, 9. ‡ Ps. v. 8.**

Joseph, who, like herself, had made a vow of virginity; but having returned to the world, in obedience to the voice of superior authority, she was none the less separated from it in mind and heart. Her tastes were wholly different from those of the world, and never did she permit one moment of her time to be occupied with its vain and frivolous pursuits.

In her humble abode in Nazareth, she devoted every moment that the exercise of charity, and the discharge of the duties of her state left her, to solitude, meditation, and silence, wholly absorbed in the contemplation of God, and the things that belong to God. Her time was divided between prayer, work, and spiritual reading. She shrinks from public notice; she practices the most heroic virtues, but without ostentation. Her entire life shows that she desired only to please God, without the slightest reference to the judgment of the world.

The love of retirement is one of the most distinctive traits of her most holy life; she has withdrawn, as far as it was possible for her to do, from the busy scenes of the world; she has, on every occasion, avoided admiration and gratitude, only asking to be forgotten of men; and when, at the close of her earthly pilgrimage, she reviewed the years through which she had passed, her conscience gave her the consoling testimony that nothing had been done to please the world, but all and everything for God alone.

And now let us ask ourselves why the Most Blessed Virgin led this kind of life, and see what lessons it teaches us.

Mary led a hidden life because God required it of her, and she never conceived a wish or a thought but to accomplish His holy will.

Mary led a hidden life because she thoroughly understood its advantages. She knew how many facilities it offers for the exercise of piety, prayer, and thanksgiving, and how much interior consolation the soul derives from communion with God. She knew that it is written, the "Lord is not in the tempest,"* and she could fully appreciate that tranquillity and calm so conducive to the uninterrupted enjoyment of the presence of God.

Mary led a hidden life, so that she might more entirely conform to the example and counsels of Jesus Christ. Did she not see Him passing thirty years of a retired, obscure, and unknown life, and was it not her whole study to reproduce in herself every trait of that adorable model of the elect? Did she not most faithfully observe all His counsels, and consequently those which relate to our withdrawing ourselves from the world? "Let the dead bury their dead;"† "leave all and follow me;"‡ "every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred-fold, and shall possess life everlasting."§

Mary led a hidden life, and practiced, in a special manner, the virtue of silence, in order that nothing might disturb, that nothing might pass between her soul and the inspirations of grace, and that she might the more unreservedly contemplate the Incarnate Word, Him who is the everlasting Voice, and who manifested Himself to her in a singular manner.

Oh, what subjects are here presented for our admiration! Heaven and earth, the angels and the shepherds, speak of the great mystery of the birth of our Saviour, and the Holy Virgin, through whom He is given to the world, looks on in silence, contenting herself with listening to what is said and treasuring it in her heart. In the temple she hears the aged Simeon give expression to his happiness on beholding Him who is the Light of the nations, and again she heard him foretell the sorrows by which she would be overwhelmed, and she is silent, thus manifesting her resignation to the will of God, while she is absorbed in the most profound adoration of the Eternal Word, who, but a few days before, had become an infant.

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* 3 Kings xix. 11. † St. Luke ix. 60. ‡ St. Mark x. 21.
§ St. Matt. xix. 29.

Finally, let us consider that Mary led a hidden life, because, by the light of reason and faith, she understood what dangers surrounded intercourse with the world; what snares are there laid for innocence; how much the allurements to sin, in which the world abounds, are to be dreaded. Besides, nothing there harmonized with the interior dispositions of her soul.

The world lives in forgetfulness of God, and Mary thought of nothing but God. The world esteems and pursues frivolity, vanity, and pleasure; everything there, according to the language of the Apostle St. John, "is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life," * and Mary felt in her soul attractions diametrically the opposites of these. She esteemed and sought after riches of the supernatural order; she desired only the triumph of virtue, and derived all her consolation from the exercise of charity and the practice of divine love. She prepared herself in advance, through her thoughts and affections, for that world of glory in which she was one day to occupy the highest throne next to that of her Divine Son.

APPLICATION.

Favored with the grace of a religious vocation, let us properly appreciate our holy state, and, from the depths of our hearts, bless the goodness of God that has called us to it. Like Mary in the temple, and in the sacred retirement of her humble dwelling, let us, in our communities, attend wholly to the things of God and to the mysteries of His love for us.

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* St. John ii. 16.

Let us not entangle ourselves with the affairs of the world, for they are, unhappily, but too fruitful a source of distractions, anxieties, restlessness, and temptations. Let us live as if we were interiorly convinced we had but one object to occupy our thoughts, and that object, Eternity.

The Apostle St. John says to the faithful, "Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world."* Let us consider those words as addressed especially to us Religious, who are separated from the world by our engagements, our habit, and our exercises, and who cannot put ourselves in irregular intercourse with it without incurring the greatest danger, nor without becoming a source of scandal both to it and to our Brothers. Let us, therefore, avoid mingling with those of the world, restricting our relations with them to what the duties of our state and the directions of our Superiors require. Let us avoid all ostentation; let us not make a parade of the good we may have been able to do, but let it be sufficient for us that God knows it. Let us love the solitude of our communities. While observing our rules in reference to separation from the world, let us give particular attention to those in relation to silence, and which are, in fact, so important to our spiritual advancement. Let us speak little to men but much to God and His angels. Let us not concern ourselves about things that are passing away, but with those which are unchangeable. Let us live with Jesus in time, and thus merit to live with Him in eternity.

PRAYER.

O Mary, wise and prudent Virgin, who, by the power of grace which you possessed in its fulness, chose the better part, and made it your most agreeable occupation to meditate, in your heart, on the adorable mysteries which were taking place under your own eyes, teach me, I beseech you, to appreciate, as you did, a hidden and an humble life; to shun the world, so full of dangers; religiously to observe silence; to make for myself a solitude within my heart, that I may, like you, unceasingly converse with God and His angels.

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* St. John ii. 15.

Grant, O my good Mother, that, through your powerful assistance, I may imitate your retirement and your union with God, faithfully discharge all my duties as a Religious, and finally merit the heavenly recompense which awaits that fidelity.

See *Résumés*, page 436.

51.—MODESTY OF THE MOST BLESSED VIRGIN.

The fruit of humility is the fear of the Lord, riches, and glory, and life.—PROV. xxii. 4.

CONSIDERATION.

MODESTY is the expression, the outward form of humility and purity, as well as of the respect due to God and men. It regulates our looks, our words, our appearance, and our demeanor, in which it suffers nothing but what is becoming and reserved. To define what it is is sufficient to give us to understand that Mary was its most perfect model.

Did she not practice all the virtues which are the foundation of modesty, and in a manner the most perfect? Who has ever been so humble as she, who, though Mother of God, assumed no other title than handmaid of the Lord? Who so pre-eminent in purity as the "Virgin of virgins," to whom God Himself has said, "Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is no spot in thee?"* Who has ever shown the same degree of respect, understanding this word in its most general sense?

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* Cant. iv. 7.

Mary respected God, always keeping herself in His holy presence with sentiments of the most profound adoration, carefully guarding against everything, in thought, word, or act, that was not acceptable in the eyes of that Sovereign Master; she respected men in whom faith showed her the image and the children of God; she respected herself, knowing what she was through the goodness of God.

No; no one ever equalled Mary in humility, in purity, in respect, and, consequently, no one ever equalled her in the practice of modesty, which is but the expression of these three virtues, and which she guarded from the purest motives of reason and religion.

Mary was modest from prudence, so that she might guard the precious treasure of her purity and holiness. Conceived in grace, born in grace, she had nothing to fear for her virtue. Yet she was no less careful to fortify it with all the safeguards which were prescribed or suggested.

Mary was modest through a desire to please God, of honoring Him exteriorly as she adored Him interiorly; for she understood that the worship which is due to our Creator embraces the whole man, and that the body must, in its own degree, participate in this worship.

Mary was modest from obedience to God, who enjoins modesty in His law; she was modest also from a sense of justice, because she knew that modesty constitutes a very essential part of the edification we are bound to give our neighbor, and because it is incumbent upon all to observe the proprieties of their state.

Mary was modest through conformity with Jesus Christ, whose looks, words, and demeanor reflected the beauty of His divine soul, and expressed the sentiments of His adorable heart, that sanctuary of every virtue.

St. Paul says to the faithful, "I beseech you by the mildness and modesty of Christ,"* thereby teaching us that modesty was one of the distinctive characteristics of the Saviour. So it was, also, with His Most Holy Mother, who devoted herself thoroughly to study that adorable model, and to form herself on its resemblance.

Mary was always modest, and was modest in all things. From her very tenderest years, her outward demeanor was the admiration of all who beheld her. Her greatest beauty, according to the expression of the royal prophet, was "within,"† but the qualities of the soul necessarily manifested themselves in her exterior demeanor, thus fulfilling those other words of the Psalmist, "The Queen stood on thy right hand in gilded clothing, surrounded with variety."‡

The modesty of Mary, so admirable in her tenderest years, was constantly developing into still greater perfection. In the temple, at Nazareth, at Bethlehem, in Egypt, ever the Virgin "full of grace," she appeared all heavenly, and as the personification of the same virtue.

Therefore St. Ambrose has written, "Keep always represented before your mind, as in a picture, the whole life of Mary, in whom the perfect image of chastity and of virtue shone as in a mirror. Humble of heart, grave in her language, prudent in her designs, she spoke little, respected every one, and shunned vanity. Her gestures, her walk, the tone of her voice, her whole exterior was in harmony with the super-eminent sanctity of her soul. Her walk, her words impressed all who saw or heard her with such profound respect, that they seemed not so much to see the body move as her virtues to shine forth."

Christian piety can form no conception of Mary but as robed in more than angelic modesty. Thus she is always represented with her eyes cast down or uplifted toward Heaven, or gazing upon the infant God. "The looks of Mary," says St. Thomas of Villanova, "scarcely glanced at things of earth, so much was her soul occupied with the contemplation of the things of Heaven." St. Epiphanius, speaking of the Virgin Mother of God, said that she was affability itself; that she spoke little, but always with wisdom and edification. Could she, indeed, in her answer to St. Elizabeth, have expressed herself with more justice, gravity, humility, and respect? Was it not the same when, having found the child Jesus, she informed Him of her grief, and also when, as St. Augustine remarks, she named, through deference, St. Joseph before herself, in the words, "Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." *

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* 2 Cor. x. 1. † Ps. xliv. 14. ‡ Ps. xliv. 10.

At the marriage-feast of Cana, she could not have spoken in language more reserved or more becoming, or better adapted to obtain that which she asked from the omnipotence of her divine Son.

The modesty of Mary was not less admirable when considered in its effects. What honor did it give to God, and how much edification to men! What merits did it procure for her! Through this virtue the whole life of the august Virgin was but one homage of adoration to the ever-present God, and a sublime lesson working numberless fruits of salvation in the souls of men, and, naturally, drawing their hearts from the things of this earth, that they may be better disposed to love those which belong to Heaven.

APPLICATION.

Let us imitate, in as perfect a manner as we are capable of, the modesty of Mary, for we know how necessary that virtue is for us. Do we not know into how many dangers we are led by want of reflection, giddiness, unguarded looks and words. How many persons, alas! could say, "My eye hath wasted my soul." † Does not experience prove that among those who, having begun well, end badly,

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* St. Luke ii. 48.

† Lam. iii. 51.

there is not, perhaps, one who could not attribute his fall to the immodesty of his looks?

Let us not forget that the Religious should manifest in his outward demeanor the sentiments of piety, humility, and respect with which he ought to be penetrated; that if he fails to do so he will be a source of scandal to his neighbor, and that it is to him, more especially, it is said, "Let your modesty be known to all men; the Lord is nigh." *

Let us be modest at all times and under all circumstances, alone as when in company, remembering that we can never escape from the eyes of God. Let us be modest in our looks, and be assured that, in this respect, we cannot push our circumspection and prudence too far.

Let our words, our manner, our appearance, our conduct be such as become those who have abandoned the world and profess to belong to God and to His service.

It is thus that we shall reflect honor on our vocation; that we shall prove ourselves worthy of the choice God has been pleased to make of us; that we shall continue to edify our neighbor and attract him to the love and practice of virtue; that we shall afford consolation to the sacred hearts of Jesus and Mary, and merit for ourselves their continued favors, until we shall obtain that of beholding them in the glory of heaven.

PRAYER.

O Mary, who did so faithfully imitate your adorable Son, how far, alas! am I from walking in your footsteps! I lament, in your presence, my want of conformity to you, but particularly my want of reflection, my failure to keep due guard over my looks and the indiscretion of my words. Vouchsafe, O my good Mother, to help me by your protection and to obtain for me the grace to practice, like you, the modesty becoming my holy state, so that I may become

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* Philipp. iv. 5.

a constant source of edification to my neighbor, and render myself worthy of the recompense promised to those who shall have accomplished the work of God with the perfection He requires of His servants.

See *Résumés*, page 437.

52.—MARY THE MODEL OF UNION WITH JESUS CHRIST.

I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me.—GAL. ii. 20.

CONSIDERATION.

THE Divine Word, even before He became Incarnate, dwelt more perfectly in Mary than in any other creature, human or angelic. He dwelt in her mind, which He illumined with the purest light; He dwelt in her heart, which He inflamed with the fires of the most cordial charity; He dwelt in her whole soul, which He inundated with the most abundant grace and adorned with the splendor of His own beauty. Therefore it was that the angel Gabriel, when saluting her, said, "The Lord is with thee."

Yes, the Lord, the Word of God, was with the Most Blessed Virgin, and she was with Him by her faithful cooperation with His graces. She united herself to Him with all the powers of her soul, fully comprehending that in Him alone is our life, our light, our strength; that, all things having been created by Him, it is only by uniting with Him that all things can return to Him and fulfil their true destiny.

But what character does this union of Mary with the Word assume when the Word Himself, coming down from Heaven, becomes incarnate in her virginal womb! The same blood circulates through Him and through her; the same breath gives life to both. Ah! if the Son of God become man was afterward to say to His disciples, "As I am in my Father and my Father is in me, so are you in me and I in you," * with how much more reason could He address these words to His Most Holy Mother when He was enclosed in her sacred womb: and receiving from her His natural life, He repaid her a hundred-fold by communicating to her His divine life!

O sweet mystery of Jesus living in Mary, and Mary living in Jesus and for Jesus! No, there is nothing more wonderful than this union of such a creature with her Creator, or rather than this ineffable unity. †

After His birth the Most Blessed Virgin was not less united to Jesus. In what situation, in fact, can we represent this divine Mother, in which she does not appear, in our eyes, as one with Him, in thought and sentiment, having with Him, in the most perfect degree, but one mind, one heart, one will, one soul? Let us contemplate her, for instance, near the crib in Bethlehem, bestowing all her cares on the infant Jesus: who cannot understand that she lives more in Him than in herself; that her heart is entirely in Him who is her only treasure; ‡ that she is all absorbed in Him, and can do nothing but for Him!

And this is the case during the whole course of her holy career. We always behold her living in Jesus, and in the life of Jesus, desiring only what He desires, loving what He loves, and wishing what He wishes, sharing in all His joys and sorrows, and more keenly sensible to them than to those which were personal to herself.

That union continues, or rather it is cemented more closely, on the day of our Lord's suffering and death. When the Apostles abandoned their divine Master; when He was forsaken by earth, and, in some sense, by Heaven

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* St. John xiv. 20. † M. Olier. ‡ See St. Matt. vi. 21.

itself;* when He was exposed upon the cross, an object of derision, covered with ignominy, and suffering the most unutterable tortures, Mary is there, suffering voluntarily and through compassion all that He suffered, drinking of the same bitter chalice, even to the very dregs; she was crucified with Him in her soul, and her heart was united to that adorable heart which was "bruised for our sins." †

And after the resurrection she is equally united to Him, constantly thinking of Him, loving only Him, rejoicing in His glorious victory over death and sin, and the happy results which are to flow from it, and participating in the glorious life which He took in the bosom of death, and which will be the life of regenerated humanity.

On the day of His ascension Jesus returns to His Father, but does not the soul of His Most Holy Mother, in some measure, ascend to Heaven with Him? Is it not there she is to dwell henceforth in all her aspirations and desires? Is it not in Heaven that her thoughts and affections would be exclusively centred, if He who is her all did not remain on earth in the sacrament of His love?

Not yet being able to unite with Him in His glory, she unites with Him daily in the Eucharistic sacrament, "and in the communication of the breaking of bread." ‡ Oh! what must have passed in her soul when she possessed her divine Son; when her maternal heart was in immediate contact with that adorable heart, which is the very furnace of love? What communications took place between those two hearts, which now constitute but one, so intimately are they united!

Yes, O Holy Virgin, your life is hidden in that of Jesus; it is Jesus who thinks, loves, wishes in you and by you, and it is you who, more than all other creatures should utter those words of the Apostle, "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me." Your union with Him became more and more perfect, until it reached the very consummation of perfection. You were one with Him, and He was one with you, by the profusion of the spiritual treasures He lavished on you, and by making you the most perfect image of His own adorable person.

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* See St. Matt. xxvii. 46. † Isaias liii. 5. ‡ Acts ii. 42.

The union of Mary with Jesus rendered the Most Blessed Virgin pre-eminently dear to the heavenly Father, who saw in her Him with whom she was so intimately united, and through whom she never ceased to offer Him a worthy homage of adoration, thanksgiving, love, and prayer. That union constituted her glory and her merit, because Jesus, living in her, communicated to her His divine perfections, and enriched her with His graces, while she, by her co-operation with these graces, in all the strength of her will, accumulated in her soul treasures upon treasures, until she ascended above the comprehension even of the angels themselves.

That union preserved and perfected in her the virtue of charity. "Tell me," exclaims St. Thomas of Villanova, "what fires of love must have kindled in the heart of Mary from an intercourse so prolonged, conversations so frequent, and the constant society of the God of love!" Is it not demonstrated by our every day's experience that persons become like those with whom they constantly associate? If this is so, must we not conclude that Mary was, in the most perfect manner that was possible, like to Jesus Christ Himself?

APPLICATION.

Let us endeavor, like Mary, to be united with Jesus in a pure, intimate, constant, and unalterable union, for there is nothing more noble, more honorable, more advantageous to us than to be one with Him, who is our head, and through whom alone we can triumph over the enemy of our souls and gain eternal glory!

If we desire to procure for ourselves, to the extent to which it is our duty to aspire, this union so sweet, so glorious, and so beneficial, let us do all that Jesus requires at our hands, and to do which He gives us the necessary grace. Let us avoid, as much as possible, all association with the busy and tumultuous world; let us live retired and apart from it, as our rules enjoin; let us keep a proper check over all the impulses of our hearts; let us love only Jesus or for the sake of Jesus, and let Him alone reign in our hearts. Let us offer to our Heavenly Father, through Jesus living in us, our words and actions, and our Father in heaven will accept them and make them meritorious for heaven.

"The ivy," says Louis of Grenada, "cannot, of itself, rise from the ground, but when clinging to a tree, it rises to the height of that tree; so is it with our works, humble and lowly though they may he, yet they acquire a heavenly character when united to the Tree of Life planted in the midst of the Church, that is to say, to Jesus Christ Himself."

Above all, let us be faithful to the exercises of piety, remembering that it is chiefly by fervent prayer, serious meditations, frequent and devout communions, that our union with the Divine Master is preserved and strengthened; that it is through Him alone we can attain to life and salvation.

PRAYER.

O most pure Virgin, merciful Queen, holy among the saints, hope of our fathers and joy of the faithful, it is you who, through your Divine Son, have brought us into the way that leads to the Heavenly Father,* give us to understand how necessary it is for us to acquire and preserve a union with Him who has said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," † and by your intercession obtain for us the grace to persevere therein, so that, making but one with Him on earth, we may also make but one with Him in heaven. Amen.

* St. Ephrem. † St. John xiv. 6.

See *Résumés*, page 437.

53. — MARY THE MODEL OF PRUDENCE.

Live and walk by the ways of prudence. — PROV. ix. 6.

CONSIDERATION.

PRUDENCE consists in discerning, choosing, and employing the means best calculated to conduct us to our end, and in warning us against whatever might prove an obstacle to it. No creature has ever so excelled in this virtue as the Most Blessed Virgin, whom the Church invokes and honors under the title of "Most Prudent Virgin."

By the light of the Holy Ghost she understood more perfectly than any one else that God is our only end, and that nothing is necessary, useful, or profitable but that which brings or tends to bring us to Him; that, on the contrary, nothing is hurtful to us but that which removes, or tends to remove us from Him; and it was according to these principles that she regulated all the conduct of her life.

She conformed her life to all the precepts and counsels of the Lord, so many of which relate to the virtue of prudence. Did she not hear Him say by the mouth of the wise man, Live and walk by the ways of prudence: "purchase prudence, for it is more precious than silver"?* It is one of those things than which "men can have nothing more profitable in life." †

With what extraordinary diligence did she apply herself to the practice of a virtue recommended by the Holy Ghost Himself!

From the earliest dawning of her reason to the moment of her death, Mary excelled in prudence. She never ceased to tend to God, and to tend to Him by the most direct way.

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* Prov. xvi. 16. † Wisdom viii. 7.

Keeping all her senses under the most absolute control, her heart was open only to the influences of grace. "She did not ask," says St. Bernard, "riches, honor, or power, but she asked for grace, which alone can save us, and which we ought to desire and seek in preference to everything else. Therefore the angel said to her, "Thou hast found grace with God." *

Mary was all for God, and desired to belong wholly to Him. She advanced constantly toward Him, permitting nothing to check or impede her in her course.

At whatever moment of her life we may consider her, we can say of her, as our Divine Saviour said of the sister of Lazarus, "Mary has chosen the better part." † Before she determined she deliberated, wishing to be certain of what the Sovereign Master, whom alone she desired to please, required of her under each particular circumstance; and when she knew His will, she at once accomplished it by the means most acceptable to Him, and in the most perfect manner.

She was prudent in the use of her senses, of the faculties of her mind and heart, and of the goods of this world, employing what was at her disposal only to assist in her journey to God and advance her more intimate union with Him.

The prudence of Mary was pre-eminently a prudence of precaution, and it is in this light we can most profitably consider it. No creature has practiced the evangelical maxims in the same degree as the Blessed Virgin: "Watch and pray;" ‡ . . . "Be ready, for you know not the day nor the hour;" § . . . "Be ye wise as serpents and simple as doves." ||

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* St. Luke i. 30. † Ibid. x. 42. ‡ St. Matt. xxvi. 41. § Ibid. xxv. 13. || Ibid. x. 16

Let us contemplate her at the moment when the angel Gabriel salutes her as full of grace and blessed among women; she listens in silence, "and thought within herself what manner of salutation this should be."* A sentiment of fear seizes her; she needs light from on high and reassurance from the divine messenger; and when He has made known to her the designs of God, she gives her consent only when assured that these designs are perfectly reconcilable with the vow of virginity she had made in the temple.

The same wisdom, the same circumspection is observable in every act of her life. And, here, what admirable lessons does she not give us! Conceived without sin, confirmed in grace, preserved wholly from the attacks of concupiscence, exempt from our moral wretchedness and our turbulent appetites, she still uses all the precautions which our frailties render indispensably necessary for us, and which are so urgently recommended to us.

She never knew those failings that divert us from the right path; those desires of our corrupt nature that disturb and trouble us; those tempests that agitate and overpower us; those violent storms whose fury can shake the pillars of Heaven and uproot the cedars; she had nothing to fear from the world; her virtue was superior to its greatest dangers; and yet she dreaded even the slightest danger, and considered herself secure only when she had fled from the very shadow of temptation. "She has nothing to fear," says St. Ambrose, "yet she fears everything." An edifice built upon a rock, she is yet fortified against the tempest.

Through prudence, she observed as rigorous an abstinence as if she had need of subduing her body; she observed silence, and, when she spoke, reserve in her words, as if she had reason to distrust her own discretion; she labored as much as if she feared that idleness would lead her into sin.

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* St. Luke i. 29.

Through prudence she shunned the world, filled as it is with so many snares for innocence. Like the dove of the patriarch Noah, she flew above that dangerous sea, and rested only in the holy ark — in the temple of God, where she led a life of retirement and prayer.

Through prudence she kept the closest watch over her senses, her mind, and heart, and thus truly merited the title of "a garden enclosed"* of the divine Spouse, to which none could dispute the possession of that inestimable treasure.

What a victory she thus gained over the enemy of our salvation! The first Eve had unhappily listened to the malignant serpent, the second Eve crushed him under her foot, and it was in vain that he attempted to lie in wait for her heel, for never did she admit into her mind a single thought emanating from that spirit of evil. Her heart was always a temple of love, resplendent with the most transcendent sanctity, in the centre of which there arose a throne formed of the gold of every virtue.

APPLICATION.

Like Mary, let us be prudent, and prudent in everything. Let us never forget that we are constantly assaulted by a multitude of enemies; that snares are scattered everywhere over the path we tread here below; that sin is produced in the soul, when we rush into occasions of danger, just as flax is lit up when it comes in contact with fire. Ah! let us be vigilant, then, over our senses, our mind, and our heart; watchful particularly over our eyes, through which temptation finds such ready access to our imagination. Let us say, with Job, "I made a covenant with my eyes,"† that I should have no bad thought.

Let us fervently ask, through the intercession of Mary, for the spirit of discernment, saying with the Psalmist,

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* Cant. iv. 12. † Job xxxi. 1.

"Show, O Lord, thy ways to me, and teach me thy paths." * Oh! how necessary is this knowledge for us, who desire not only to advance toward God ourselves, but to conduct the youth committed to our care to an intimate union with Him!

Above all, let us, as Religious, cherish the virtue of holy obedience. Let us follow, with docility, the directions of our superiors, being convinced that we are unsafe guides for ourselves; that a Religious who is not a child of obedience fails, most essentially, in the rules of prudence; that it is the blind leading the blind, † and falling into inevitable destruction.

Our own personal experience will teach us what we are most carefully to avoid as being occasion of sin to us. We must also learn from the experience of others, justly supposing that what has happened to one may also happen to another, and that if we follow in the path of those whose virtue suffered shipwreck, ours also may be shattered against the same rocks.

PRAYER.

O Virgin most prudent, throne of divine wisdom; O you who have chosen the better part, vouchsafe to cast upon me a look of pity, since I am so cold in my desire to imitate you. You know what perils surround me, and what little precaution I take to avoid them. Oh grant that, through your intercession, I may adopt a new mode of life. Obtain for me, O loving Mother, the spirit of wisdom and prudence, and the grace faithfully to follow its inspirations, until I shall possess, with you, the Lord, who is my end, and in whom alone I shall possess happiness and peace.

See *Résumés*, page 438.

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* Ps. xxiv. 4.

† See Luke vi. 39.

54.—MARY THE MODEL OF GOODNESS AND MEEKNESS.

Put ye on . . . the bowels of mercy.—COL. iii. 12.

CONSIDERATION.

MEEKNESS comes from charity and goodness, of which it is the most ordinary expression. It was one of the distinctive characteristics of the most distinguished personages of the old and new law, particularly of the just Abel, of the patriarchs Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Job. This virtue also characterized Moses, whom the Holy Scriptures call "exceeding meek," * and David, who thus addressed God: "O Lord, remember David and all his meekness." † It shone with equal lustre in the saints of the New Testament, and with many of them it constituted, if we may so speak, the very foundation of their character. Of these were St. Ignatius the martyr, St. John the almoner, and St. Francis de Sales.

But there is none in whom it shone with so much lustre as in the Most Holy Virgin. The beloved of the Father, she was, in a higher degree than any other creature, the image of His perfections; and among these are not goodness, meekness, and mercy those which He is pleased more particularly to manifest in this world? as the royal prophet informs us: "O Lord, Thy mercy is in heaven, and Thy truth reacheth even to the clouds. Thy justice is as the mountains of God." ‡

A Virgin wise by excellence, Mary possessed all attributes of wisdom, so that it might be said of her: "In her

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* Numb. xii. 3. † Ps. cxxxi. 1. ‡ Ps. xxxv. 6, 7.

is the spirit of understanding; holy, sweet — loving that which is good." "She is the brightness of eternal light, and the unspotted mirror of God's majesty and the image of His goodness." * "She reacheth, therefore, from end to end mightily, and ordereth all things sweetly." †

Mother of the Son, Mary was perfectly conformable to Him, who, equal to His Father, desired, through His goodness and mercy, to humble Himself so low as to assume our human nature, to call Himself the "Lamb of God," exalting meekness by beautifying those who practice it; inculcating it particularly in these words: "Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart," ‡ and giving us, in His own person, the most impressive examples of it by pardoning His enemies and praying for them at the very moment when they were crucifying Him.

Spouse of the Holy Ghost, the Most Blessed Virgin was abundantly endowed from the moment of her birth with the incomparable grace of charity, to which she most faithfully corresponded. Her immaculate heart was the temple of the spirit of love, which, taking entire possession of her soul, brought forth in it all His fruits, among which are "charity, . . . peace, patience, goodness, . . . and mildness." §

Predestined to be the Mother of the human race, the representative of divine mercy, the altar of heavenly clemency, our advocate with the Supreme Judge, the refuge of sinners and the comfortress of the afflicted, it was necessary that she should appear to us clothed with goodness, charity, pity, and kindness; that we should behold her under an aspect the most calculated to inspire confidence and banish from our hearts every shadow of fear.

And it is exactly thus that she presents herself to us throughout every act of her most holy life, fulfilling these

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* Wisdom vii. 22–26. † Ibid. viii. 1. ‡ St. Matt. xi. 29.

§ Gal. v. 22, 23.

words of the inspired writer: "She will render him good, and not evil, all the days of her life." "She hath opened her mouth to wisdom, and the law of clemency is on her tongue."* The Gospel has handed down to us but few of her words, but these are sufficient to manifest her meekness and goodness of heart. Whether she addresses the angel Gabriel, or Elizabeth, or speaks to her divine Son in the temple of Jerusalem, or at the marriage-feast of Cana, her blessed lips distil only sweetness. "We do not find in the mouth of Mary," says St. Bonaventure, "but the milk and honey of the Holy Ghost."

She appears as the radiant "Morning Star," smiling upon the earth and rejoicing every eye. She won the hearts of all who saw her, and, in this way, as in others, realized those words of Jesus Christ: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land."†

Never, say the holy Fathers, was there seen in her the least sign of impatience. She was spurned, despised, and rejected, but her charity experienced no diminution; and could the very depths of her heart have been laid bare even at the moment when, on Calvary, she was pierced through with the sword of sorrow foretold by the aged Simeon, it would have been seen that it was overflowing with goodness and tenderness for those who were crucifying her adorable Son, under her very eyes!

Did she not practice, in perfection, the evangelical counsels, and, consequently, those which exhibited the sublimest attributes of charity: "Love your enemies: do good to those who hate you; pray for those who persecute and calumniate you." ‡

During the last years of her life, she continually exhibited the sweetest goodness, and retraced in her conduct that of the divine Master, who loved all men with a boundless love. And when the hour arrived that was to separate her from her adopted children and unite her with Jesus in Heaven, she addressed them in words of the most lively tenderness, imparted to them her blessing, and, having assured them that she would pray for them, she sweetly smiled at death itself.

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* Proverbs xxxi. 12–26. † St. Matt. v. 4. ‡ Ibid. v. 44.

Justly, then, have the Doctors of the Church praised her meekness and goodness, and properly does the Church, delighting to decree to her titles that shall always commemorate this quality, say to her; "Hail our Sweetness! O clement Virgin, pray for us! O Virgin, meek among all virgins, obtain for us meekness and chastity." *

Yes, be thou blessed, O faithful image of the God of goodness; O worthy Mother of the Victim of our salvation; O holy Spouse of the Spirit of Chastity! Oh, be thou blessed, whom, with so much joy we call our good Mother, and whose mission in Heaven is but a mission of mercy! Permit us to say to thee, with St. Anselm, "may those who proclaim thee superior in goodness to every human creature rejoice, O holy Virgin, in experiencing its effects and attaining, through thy intercession, to eternal happiness."

APPLICATION.

The Lord, in calling us to our holy state, has vouchsafed to us the grace of meekness, which it is of essential importance that we should not suffer to remain barren in our souls. Let us be thoroughly convinced that that virtue is absolutely necessary for us, both as Religious and teachers, so that we may live in perfect harmony with our Brothers and produce good fruit among our pupils.

Let us, then, embrace the practice of this virtue. Let us exhibit nothing but kindness and benevolence to our neighbor, whoever he may be. According to the expression of St. Thomas Aquinas, let us conceive a horror of everything that might grieve our Brother. Let us preserve

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* See Salve Regina and Ave Maris Stella.

peace of mind and the most tender charity, even where we are treated unjustly. Children of Mary, let us wear her livery, and, as such, show that our hearts are full of goodness even to those who do us injustice.

Let us, by our words, restore peace to hearts that are disturbed, and respond only by our silence or our kindness to any want of attention that may be shown to us.

Let us distrust ourselves; let us be on our guard against wounded pride, resentment, and the mortification of slighted self-love, that might prompt us to violate charity. Let us suffer such emotions to pass away, and then act as becomes us, and with a view to God alone. By following this course our zeal will produce its fruits; we will accomplish good; a good that will be lasting; a good that will be a source of joy to families, of consolation to the Church, of glory to our Institute, and which will be returned to us a hundredfold when we shall appear before the Sovereign Judge.

PRAYER.

O Mary, remember your meekness, and deign to exercise it in my behalf. Favorably hear my prayer, unworthy as I am, and obtain for me the grace of reproducing, in my own life, the glorious attributes I so much admire in yours. Vouchsafe, O my good Mother, through your intercession, that while, imitating your charity and meekness, according to the duties of my state, I may be truly acceptable to the Lord, edifying to my Brothers, and also to my pupils, so as to attract them to virtue; that I may accomplish all the good that your divine Son and His holy Church require of me, so that I may deserve to experience the effects of the divine mercy for all eternity.

See *Résumés*, page 438.

55.—MARY THE MODEL OF PERSONS CONSECRATED TO GOD.

He that followeth me walketh not in darkness. — ST. JOHN viii. 12.

CONSIDERATION.

JESUS CHRIST, when proposing to establish in His Church the religious life, or the practice of the Evangelical counsels, willed that His divine Mother should first open the road to the chosen souls whom He should call to that high privilege, and that she should be to them a perfect model of all the virtues they should practice in it.

This we know to be the case, for whatever virtue, characteristic of the religious life, we choose to consider, we see it, in all its perfection, in the faithful Virgin saluted as full of grace, and whose only study was to render herself more and more agreeable to God.

Called to a life of retirement from the world, she appreciated her vocation, and at once responded to it, knowing, as Jeremias expresses it, that "it is good for a man when he hath borne the yoke from his youth." *

Hence, when only three years of age, she leaves father and mother to consecrate herself to God. She devotes herself without reserve and forever to that Sovereign Master, and makes to Him an offering of all that she has and of all that she is; she will remain her whole life in this disposition without even conceiving the thought of regretting the sacrifice; serving the Lord with the greatest fidelity in His holy temple; and when, at length, she will be obliged to leave it, she will not cease to serve Him in the most

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* Lamen. iii. 27.

perfect manner, carrying about with her everywhere the spirit of prayer, the recollection and silence of the temple.

With what splendor the qualities that ought to characterize persons consecrated to God, shine in her! How sublimely, for example, did she practice the virtues which are the object of the three vows of a religious life!

According to her revelations to St. Bridget, she made the promise to God to possess nothing in this world. She was poor, and poor from choice, enduring, in the spirit of faith, resignation, and even of holy joy, all the consequences of that condition of life. She loved poverty, and manifested that love under every circumstance; her garments, her food, her house, her furniture — all were simple, ordinary, and poor, revealing a contempt for riches and an aversion to luxury. She was poor in the temple, when she received only what was given her by those who had the disposal of the offerings made to the Lord; she was poor at Nazareth, where she was known only as the spouse of an artisan; she was poor even to destitution at Bethlehem, where she could not find even a shelter. But she is always pleased at being in want of perishable riches, thus walking the first in the very steps that were to be trodden by Him who, possessing all things, made Himself poor for love of us, so as to be forced to say, "The Son of man hath not where to lay His head." *

She was adorned with a purity more than angelic, which she preserved unsullied to the moment of her death, and which delivered her even from the power of death, meriting for her that her virginal flesh should be free from the corruption of the grave, and should be assumed in heaven, to shine there as the most radiant star next to the humanity of our Saviour.

Conceived without sin, and preserved from concupiscence, she does not, on that account, fail to take all the

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* St. Matt. viii. 20.

precautions which are enjoined on us — on us who, alas! are so prone to evil — fasting, mortifications, retirement from the world, modesty, vigilance, interior recollection, prayer; she omits nothing that can contribute to the preservation of that lily of holy virtue which droops at the slightest breath. Thus the Church delights to call her, "Virgin of virgins," "Mother most pure," "Queen of virgins," "Virgin most venerable," "worthy of all praise, who alone was without stain."

But who, also, can conceive the excellence of her obedience? What characteristics did that virtue, so beautiful and so acceptable in the eyes of God, present in the life of Mary? Obedience in everything that the law prescribed, even when her dignity placed her above the law; obedience to her parents when under the paternal roof; to the priests in the temple; to St. Joseph during the whole time they were together; obedience in faith and religion, seeing in every Superior the representative of God — obedience prompt, exact, simple, unmurmuring, devoted, and generous.

Yes, Mary is the model of the virtues we have taken a solemn vow to observe; she is equally the model of all the others we ought to possess, such as humility, piety, love of labor, zeal, meekness, charity, silence, and purity of thought.

Possessing all the treasures of heaven, she was humble almost to annihilation. Elevated by her prerogatives above the seraphim, in her wonderful humility she places herself beneath the lowest of men.

More enlightened than Mary the sister of Lazarus, she chose the better part, which consists in union with God. Far from disturbing her interior recollection, her fellow-beings only aided in intensifying it, just as a portrait aids us in thinking of the person it represents. Her whole life was but one continued meditation and prayer, uniting itself perfectly with the performance of her other duties. Thus, as the holy Fathers remark, she united the contemplative life of Mary with the active life of Martha, laboring up to the full measure of her strength from motives of faith, and also from the desire to please God and accomplish His holy will.

There can be no doubt that she exercised her wonderful zeal directly on those persons with whom she came in contact. Besides, did she not do this in the most efficacious manner by her example? Who could behold her and not feel the love of virtue kindling in his heart, and a strong desire to glorify God by a holy life awakening in his soul?

Who ever observed, as she did, silence, recollection, retirement, fidelity even in things the most minute? Who ever proposed to themselves ends more holy, more noble, more worthy the complacent regards of the Sovereign Master?

And when we consider that she not only persevered in the practice of virtue, but that she was continually advancing therein, shall we not proclaim her to be the very model of holiness, the exemplar that should ever be before the eyes of all Christians, but particularly of those who by their state ought to aspire to perfection?

APPLICATION.

Let us celebrate and praise the super-eminent holiness of Mary, "whose virtues," says St. Ambrose, "were such that they have made her life the rule for all conditions. Let us give thanks to God, from whom all her virtues flowed; let us bless Him for the great things which He wrought by His grace in the soul of the Most Blessed Virgin, who rose to the height of His great designs in her regard.

But let us not be content with admiring; let us endeavor to imitate this glorious model. Let us try to imitate the life of this Divine Mother, to follow it, in our own lives, from virtue to virtue, until we reach the perfection of all. Let us strive to act as she did, or as she would act if she were in the same circumstances with us.

Like her, and under her holy patronage, we have renounced the world to consecrate ourselves to the service of God. Ah! that is a great step, but it is only one step. It is necessary, and it will always be necessary, to confirm our vocation by our good works, and to fulfil, in all their extent, our duties as Religious.

Let us, then, in the presence of the image of our good Mother, form the firm resolution of observing faithfully poverty and chastity, and of being the true children of obedience, of advancing constantly in the way of humility, piety, union with God, modesty, fraternal charity, and zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Let us, with the assistance of divine grace, advance from virtue to virtue; let us give to God as generously as He gives to us; let us make continual progress, remembering that a Religious should propose to himself what is most perfect, and aspire to the most glorious thrones that Jesus Christ has reserved for His friends in the kingdom of His Father.

PRAYER.

Be thou ever honored, O Holy Virgin, mirror of justice, vessel of singular devotion, worthy temple of the thrice Holy God! May heaven and earth proclaim your greatness and celebrate your virtues. Oh, thou who art the model of all souls, but particularly of those who are called to a religious life, vouchsafe to interest yourself in our behalf with your Divine Son, over whose heart you are all powerful, and to obtain for us, in His mercy, the necessary grace to faithfully follow in your steps, so that we may thus serve Him on earth in the manner most pleasing to Him, and be found worthy to enjoy Him, with you, forever, in heaven.

See *Résumés*, page 439.

56.—THE PERFECTION AND SANCTITY OF MARY.

The Lord hath been well pleased with thee.—ISAIAS lxii. 4.

CONSIDERATION.

THE divine Word, wishing to become man to save man, ought," as St. Augustine says, "to choose a Mother whose virtues would be more heroic and more perfect than those of any other creature." According to St. Thomas, God gives to every man a grace suitable to the state to which He calls him, or to the spiritual dignity for which He is destined; and as the dignity of Mother of God incomparably surpasses the highest dignity among men and angels, it follows that Mary must have been endowed with greater treasures of grace than all men and angels together.

The Son of God Himself adorned that temple in which He was to dwell. It entered into His eternal designs that His Most Holy Mother should be His most perfect image; and as He is grace, benediction, holiness itself, He wished that she also should be full of grace, blessed among all women, and more holy than the holiness of all creatures on earth or in Heaven.

"It was assuredly of the Most Blessed Virgin," says St. Gregory, "that Isaias spoke,* when he said that there should be a mountain of the house of the Lord, whose foundations would be on the top of the holy mountains, for by the dignity of her election and the sanctity of her life she surpassed all others most beloved and favored by God. To have the exalted privilege of conceiving the Eternal Word, the greatness of her merits should reach, far above all the choirs of angels, to the very throne of the Divinity."

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* Isaias ii. 2.

It is the universal opinion of the Church that the grace which Mary received, at the very instant of her immaculate conception, surpassed all the graces that have been granted to the saints and the heavenly spirits; that from the first instant she was fairer in the eyes of God, and more worthy of His love, than all the predestined. Hence she enters into life endowed with all heavenly gifts, so that, as St. Lawrence Justinian says, "All that we can conceive of merit, grace, and dignity is to be found in her."

But if it be true that she received, in their fulness, the graces measuredly given to the other predestined, it is equally true that, by her diligence and fidelity, she made them bring forth fruits corresponding to their very greatness, and that in this way she did not cease to advance, constantly and wonderfully, in sanctity and merit, like the morning star, which continually increases in brightness until the sun appears, in whose presence alone it altogether vanishes.

The other saints excelled in certain virtues; some were distinguished by their zeal for souls; others for their love of solitude and silence; others, again, for their spirit of prayer; but Mary went further, she practiced all virtues, and each one in the highest degree, so that she surpassed, immeasurably, the patriarchs and prophets in faith and hope, the apostles in zeal and devotedness, the martyrs in constancy and courage, the virgins in purity, the confessors in piety and fidelity, and the seraphim themselves in love. "She is," says St. Bernard, "the Heaven of God, and she merits that title, for she alone possessed more grace, more heavenly gifts, more virtues, than all the blessed together."

Thus, as St. Ambrose says, she is the model of every person and of every condition; she can be presented as such to the young, to the middle aged, or to old age; to the apostles of faith as to the contemplatives of the desert; to virgins, to wives, and to widows; to Religious, as well to those who live in the world. She desired nothing, and did nothing but "to respond faithfully to the voice of God, unreservedly submit to His orders, adore His providence, add to the practice of what He required, the practice of what He desired, and limit all her glory and all her ambition to the merit of pleasing Him." *

"It is certain," says Pere Le Jeune, "that from the first moment of her immaculate conception to the hour of her death, Mary continually practiced acts of love to the fullest extent and capacity of grace; and if, as the holy Fathers teach, there is in Heaven a corresponding degree of glory for every degree of grace; if fidelity to the inspirations of one grace obtains a double grace; if, as many think, the soul that has acquired a habit of virtue, and acts fully up to the extent of its grace, produces an act equal in intensity to the habit it has formed, so that it obtains each time a merit equal to the sum of merits already acquired, what an infinite aggregate of grace and merits must the glorious Virgin have acquired during the sixty-three years she lived on earth! A man who at first possessed but a small sum of money, but who should see it double in his hands every day, would soon become richer than all the princes and monarchs of the earth. Ah! what, then, must have been the spiritual wealth of the Most Holy Virgin, who, endowed from the very beginning with so many graces, saw her spiritual riches doubling not only every day, but every instant!"

Yes, Mary always put to good account the talents entrusted to her, as well as those which were added every instant. None of her spiritual wealth was unprofitable or idle. She never received a grace from heaven without drawing from it all the fruit it was intended to produce, in conformity with the designs of God. Her career here below was but a progress on the road to holiness, every hour increasing in rapidity. To one act of virtue suc-

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* The Greatness of Mary.

ceeded another act; to the merit of one sacrifice was added the merit of a new sacrifice; from one degree of perfection she rose to a higher degree; not a moment of her life in which she did not give proof of her fidelity and love. Like the plane-tree on the banks of a river, she grew constantly in justice and virtue, irrigated as she was with the plenitude of divine graces.

And now who will presume to ask what degree of holiness had Mary attained at the hour of her death? Who will presume to weigh her merits, to which the merits of that death itself must still be added?

O Most Blessed Virgin, your virtue has elevated you to heights inaccessible to the gaze of every created understanding, and it is, therefore, with reason that your servant, St. Bernard, exclaims, "You are lovely as the morning star; no creature is more like to God than you: you enlighten our darkness by the splendor of your virtues. What, then, O Blessed Virgin, is your glory, and what shall I say of you? Shall I compare you to heaven? But you are higher than heaven. Shall I call you the Queen of nations? I would fall short of the encomiums to which you are entitled. Ah! I shall call you Queen of angels, for you have every right to that glorious title."

APPLICATION.

The Lord has favored us with many graces, some of which are graces of preference, revealing that He has great designs in regard to us. But do we enter resolutely into His views? Do we make profitable use of His favors? Is there any one grace that brings forth no fruit in our souls, like the seed that fell upon the rocks, or among thorns, or by the wayside?

As Religious, we have bound ourselves to advance unceasingly toward perfection. Do we fulfil our obligations? Are we more virtuous to-day than we were yesterday? Does every day find us in advance of the preceding day? If this is not so, we have cause to fear that God will reproach us for burying the talents of grace He has given us instead of putting them to profitable use.

Ah! let us change our conduct, let us labor after perfection with serious thoughts and without delay. Everything reminds us of that duty and calls on us to fulfil it. We receive grace after grace; let us be more and more holy. Soon the time allowed us for our sanctification will have passed away, and oh! happy shall we be if we shall have passed that time well; if, unhappily, it be otherwise, we shall forever deplore our own blindness and folly.

PRAYER.

O Mary, full of grace, most prudent Virgin, who made all the gifts you received of God bring forth good fruit, vouchsafe to supplicate your Divine Son in our behalf, and obtain for us the grace whereby we may be enabled faithfully to walk in your footsteps. O most tender Mother, stretch forth your hands in aid of your poor children, so that they may succeed in the supremely-important work of their sanctification. Grant that, corresponding faithfully with all the graces with which your Divine Son favors us, we may advance from virtue to virtue, until we reach that degree of sanctity to which He has called us, and which will give us the glorious privilege of uniting with you in praising His holy name throughout all eternity.

See *Résumés*, page 439.

57.—THE HOLY NAME OF MARY.

And the name of the Virgin was Mary. — St. Luke i. 27.

CONSIDERATION.

IT was not with the name of Mary as with other names, the choice of which is determined by the will of men, and sometimes by caprice. It had, say Richard of St. Lawrence and St. Liguori, a heavenly origin, as it was by the express command of God that St. Joachim and St. Anne gave it to their glorious child.

The name of Mary signifies *illumined* or *illumining Star of the sea*, *Mistress* or *Queen*, *Sea of bitterness*, and under all these significations it is exactly appropriate to the Virgin Mary. Is she not, indeed, the Morning Star of the Sun of justice and truth, whose divine rays she spreads over the whole earth? Does she not appear to our eyes in moments of danger as a Star of safety which guides and comforts us, and restores us to confidence in God? Is she not Queen of heaven and earth, exalted above every pure creature? And, lastly, do we not behold her tried by affliction, during her mortal career, so severely that she is called "Mother of Sorrows?"

But let us hear the fathers of the Church speaking of one of the significations of the name of Mary. "That name," say they, "which signifies Star of the Sea is eminently appropriate to the Virgin Mother of God. She is justly compared to a star, for she is that star that was to arise out of Jacob,* whose rays were to illumine the world, to fill the heavens, to penetrate into hell, encompass the earth, and destroy iniquity. It is that star which hangs over the vast sea of the world, and which shines by its benefits and illumines by the lustre it leaves behind it.* As the north star leads mariners to the port they desire to reach, so does Mary guide us to glory." †

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* See Numbers xxiv. 17.

"Yes, O Holy Virgin," exclaims St. Amadeus of Lausanne, "your name is glorious among all names, as your dignity is superior to every other dignity."

If the adorable name of Jesus brings before our minds the Incarnate Word, the man-God, the Redeemer of the world, the holy name of Mary designates the beloved daughter of God, the creature most highly adorned with His gifts, the Mother of the Son of God made man, His coadjutrix in the work of redemption, our good Mother, who is filled with love and solicitude for us.

That name has become, so to speak, inseparable from the name of Jesus, and, like this adorable name, has become the object of a special devotion, of a homage constantly increasing.

What a subject of astonishment, or, rather, of admiration! Whilst so many names that once stood high on the roll of fame, or were celebrated by men for brilliant achievements or heroic deeds, have vanished from the memory of man; while so many names that it was thought, in their day, would be handed down to immortality, are now forgotten, or remembered with indifference, the name of the humble Virgin of Judah has come down through the ages, and is transmitted from generation to generation, always shining with the purest glory, and becoming more and more the object of the respect, veneration, and love of nations. Ah! how powerful it is, both from what it signifies and recalls and from the spiritual advantages it procures for us! The name of Mary is the terror of demons; "it is," says St. Thomas Aquinas, "like a thunderbolt, which confounds them, and of which we can always avail ourselves whenever they assault us; pronounced with faith, fervor, and confidence, it renders their assaults powerless and drives them off."

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* St. Bernard.

† Gerson.

"It is generally known, as the servants of Mary have so often experienced," says St. Liguori, "how powerful that name is against the allurements to sin." According to St. Peter Chrysologus, it is a sure sign of holy virtue, so much so that a person who has invoked it with fervor, under violent temptation, may be assured that he has not sinned. How many victories has it achieved! It was for this reason that St. Germanus of Constantinople said: "O Mary, Mother of God, he who affectionately pronounces your name, has grace, or is on the way of receiving it;" and St. Anselm asked but one grace — that of always having that blessed name present in his thoughts. "O Mary," he exclaimed, "may your name be on my lips in my dangers and distress as in my joy. If I obtain that favor, I have no fear of being lost, and were I at the gates of hell, your powerful hand would snatch me from it."

"The name of Mary enlightens the mind, rejoices the heart, inspires the love of virtue, and the courage to make a sacrifice. It cannot be pronounced without bringing some good to the soul. It is to the soul like a precious oil, healing its wounds, gratifying it by its delicious odor, and keeping alive in it the fire of divine love." *

According to a promise made to St. Bridget, Jesus Christ grants to all those who, wishing to correct their faults, put their confidence in Mary and invoke her holy name, contrition for their sins, the means of satisfying the divine justice, the strength to persevere, and finally the kingdom of Heaven.

"The true faithful," says the holy Church, "put their joy in the name of Mary." † Could it be otherwise? It

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* St. Liguori. † Office of the Holy Name of Mary.

brings before our eyes the sweet image of her who is our co-redemptrix, our support, our strength, our hope, the Mother of God and our Mother. The very recollection of that holy name excites the mind, inflames the heart, quickens the will, and it was for this reason that St. Bernard exclaimed: "O Mary, glorious Morning Star, no one can pronounce your name without feeling his soul inflamed with love of you, and those who love you cannot think of you without loving you more." "Your blessed name," adds St. Anthony of Padua, "is melody to my ears, honey to my lips, and joy to my heart."

But it is at the hour of death that the name of Mary is, in a special manner, a hope of salvation to the Christian soul. Happy are those who then pronounce it! Ah! would that our last words may be, "Jesus! Mary!" "O sweet death! O happy death!" exclaims St. Liguori, "which is fortified with these names of salvation!" It is, we may feel entirely confident, the near, if not the immediate, admission into that blessed abode where Jesus and Mary reign in everlasting glory.

APPLICATION.

Let us cheerfully and faithfully render to the holy name of Mary the homage of honor and invocation which is due to it. Let us never pronounce it, and teach our pupils never to pronounce it, but with respect, piety, and love. Let us invoke it under all circumstances, but more particularly in temptation and sickness. Let us ever keep before our eyes this excellent advice of St. Bernard: "Know, whoever you may be, that your life here below is but a voyage full of perils, in the midst of storms and tempests. Unless you wish to be shipwrecked, turn not your eyes from the Star of the Sea. When the tempests of temptation rage around you, look upon that Star, call upon Mary.

"If, overwhelmed with the enormity of your sins, covered with confusion at the hideous sores of your heart, terrified by the fear of punishment, you feel yourself enveloped in the darkness of sadness and gloom, and ready to sink into the abyss that yawns beneath your feet, look upon that Star and invoke the name of Mary.

"In danger, anguish, and perplexity call upon Mary; say, 'Mary.' Let that name never be far from your lips, far from your heart; but, that you may render yourself worthy to share the grace it brings with it, forget not the examples of which it will remind you."

Yes, let us invoke the name of Mary with the same sentiments of faith, confidence, and love with which the saints invoked her; protected by the shield of that name of grace, we shall escape from every danger, and, as St. Bernard tells us, we shall sweetly experience during life, and especially at the hour of our death, the full force and meaning of those words of the Evangelist: "And the name of the Virgin was Mary."

PRAYER.

Holy Virgin, merciful Queen, what joy it gives me to repeat your name, and what consolation it affords me to hear it piously pronounced! It brings before my mind my good Mother in heaven; it is my sword and buckler in every conflict with the spirit of evil; it is the key which unlocks to me the treasures of grace; it is for this reason I propose, under your powerful protection, to invoke it continually during my life, and particularly at the hour of my death.

O Most Blessed Virgin, vouchsafe, for the glory of thy name, to obtain for me the happy privilege of being one day admitted into the choirs of angels and saints who celebrate your greatness in heaven and praise it now and throughout eternity.

See *Résumés*, page 440.

58.—MARY AND THE ADORABLE TRINITY.

Thou hast found grace with God.—St. Luke i. 30.

CONSIDERATION.

MARY is the grandest work of creation, of whom it may be said, the Creator rejoiced in that work of His creation.* No one among men or angels was so richly endowed with such an abundance of heavenly favors, enriched with so many graces, or adorned with so many qualities.

In herself alone she formed a new world, more excellent than this universe or than the hierarchies of blessed spirits.

"Estimate, if you can," says the Pere Le Jeune, "all the graces and spiritual favors which God bestowed on St. John the Baptist, or which he himself acquired, during the thirty years he spent in the wilderness; those of St. Clement of Ancyra during twenty-eight years of martyrdom; of St. Lidwina during her thirty-eight years of sickness; of so many millions of martyrs, confessors, and virgins, who constitute the glory of the Church; unite all these merits and graces, and collect them all into one grand whole, yet God has so loved Mary that He gave her more than this aggregate would be from the very first instant of her Immaculate Conception. Ah! should it then astonish us that the angels, in the presence of such splendor, should exclaim, "Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun?" †

To what a height of glory was she not raised by being preordained, and chosen by the heavenly Father to be, in the fulness of time, the Mother of that same Son whom He begot of His substance in the depths of eternity! "Ah! who does not understand," says St. Bernardine of Sienna, "that that dignity comprises all others, and that the name of 'Mother of God' alone infinitely surpasses all that can be spoken or conceived under the man-God?"

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* See Ps. ciii. 31. † Cant. vi. 9.

"O man!" exclaims St. Anselm, "behold and wonder. The Eternal Father has an only Son, consubstantial with Himself; but He does not wish that that Son should belong to Himself alone. He gives Mary a part in Him, who becomes His Mother on earth, as truly as He is His Father in Heaven." "O Holy Virgin," adds the eloquent Bishop of Meaux, "had I the understanding of an angel, and that angel of the most sublime hierarchy, my conception would still be too confused to comprehend the intimate union of the Father with you. Associating you with the Eternal generation, He has made you Mother of the same Son with Himself. O prodigy! O abyss of love! What mind is not lost in the contemplation of the ineffable delights that He found in you!"

"Let every creature," say the holy Fathers, "be silent, and tremble with respect; let none be so daring as to look upon the immensity of the glory of Mary."* "Her dignity is so great that none but God can comprehend it."† "The Sovereign Lord can create a world grander and more beautiful than this universe; but He cannot give being to a creature more exalted than Mary."‡ "She is so perfect that she approaches to the Divinity."§

The divine Word, by whom all things were created, became her Son; He associated her with Himself in the work of our redemption; He became subject to her, and honored her by an obedience of thirty years. He appointed her to be the Mother of all men, and finally raised her to the highest place, next to Himself, in Heaven.

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* St. Peter Damien. † St. Bernardine. ‡ St. Bonaventure.
§ St. Thomas Aquinas.

With what favors was she not enriched! Receiving from her His humanity, by which He resembled her in His outward form, He wished, through gratitude and love, to make her, as much as possible, like to Himself, so that she was His living image. "For," says St. Bernardine of Vienna, "it was altogether proper that the divine maternity of Mary should be founded on a certain participation in the divine perfections, so far as a mere creature was capable of sharing them. In order to be the Mother of God, it was necessary that she should be raised, in a certain sense, to an equality with God, by the communication of an almost infinite grace and perfection."

Spouse of the Holy Ghost, the Most Blessed Virgin partook of the plenitude of His graces; she was adorned with all the splendor of the most sublime holiness; her immaculate heart was an ever-burning furnace of divine love; her understanding was enlightened by the purest rays of divine light, and was almost boundless in its scope of action.

"O Mary!" exclaims St. Amadeus of Lausanne, "the Holy Ghost has come upon you more than upon any other person, because, among all and above all, He has made choice of you to surpass, in the fulness of grace, all those who lived before you, as well as those who shall come after you. You have dominion over all; you reign not only over men, but over the heavenly hosts."

"What riches! What supernatural gifts!" exclaims a holy writer.* "What privileges belong to the Mother of God! O you who read these things, or hear them read, have you ever attentively pondered them? Have you ever entered into their meaning, and have you not been filled with astonishment at their recital, in contemplating the glorious Virgin raised to that wonderful height, to that immensity of glory!"

Yes, a mere glance at the relations which Mary sustained toward each of the persons of the Most Blessed Trinity will suffice to persuade us that she received, in their plenitude, all the graces and all the gifts of Heaven; that, next to God, she is greater than everything great, holier than everything holy, and that there is nothing above her but the Divinity alone.

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* Pere Gallifet.

Holy Virgin, in what language shall we be able worthily to celebrate your prerogatives? How shall we praise you as you deserve? Ah! when we attempt to do so we only utter inarticulate words.* If we but look upon your glory we are dazzled; what would it be if it were permitted us to behold you in the mansions of glory, where the Three Persons of the adorable Trinity lavish upon you in such profusion the treasures of their infinite bounty, and where you occupy the first throne after that of your Divine Son?

APPLICATION.

Let us honor Mary as the most faithful mirror, or, as St. Bernard expresses it, as the living image of the divine perfections. In her name let us bless the Three Adorable Persons of the Most Holy Trinity for the favors with which they enriched her. In union with that grateful Virgin, let us give glory to the Lord for the great things He has wrought in her.

Let us rejoice because of these ineffable privileges. Mother of God, she is also our Mother, and, consequently, her greatness is our greatness, as the property of the parents is also the property of the children.

Let us esteem it our greatest happiness to glorify her by every means afforded us in our holy state. Let us recite with fervor and assiduity the Rosary and prayers by which it is our holy practice to invoke her.

Let us love to celebrate her feasts. Let us account ourselves happy in being able to unite our voice with that of the Church in congratulating her on her election to the divine Maternity, on her other prerogatives, and especially on the exalted virtues which rendered her worthy of the choice of which she was the favored object.

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* St. Bernardine of Sienna.

In recalling to our mind the favors lavished on her by the Most Adorable Trinity, let us not overlook those which we ourselves have received, and particularly the grace of our baptism, by which we have become the adopted children of the Heavenly Father, brothers of Jesus Christ, members of His Mystic Body, and temples of the Holy Ghost.

Let us never lose sight of the duties which the dignity of the Christian character imposes on us, to which are added those that devolve on us as Religious, and let us faithfully discharge both through an ardent desire to please God and merit the protection of Mary.

PRAYER.

"All eyes are fixed on you, O Mary, as on the grand work of God, which equally interests all ages. In you the angels find joy, the just grace, and sinners pardon. With justice do all creatures invoke you, because in you, and through you, the hand of the All-powerful has, as it were, created anew that which He had already created." *

Hail, O full of grace, beloved daughter of the Father, Most Blessed Mother of the Son, august Spouse of the Holy Ghost, who have so faithfully corresponded to all the designs of the Most High. Oh! vouchsafe to supplicate your Divine Son in our behalf, and obtain for us the grace to walk in your footsteps, to live in a manner becoming our holy vocation, so that, glorifying our God here below, for all that, in His merciful goodness, He has done for us, we may be found worthy to glorify Him, with you, forever in heaven.

See *Résumés*, page 440.

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* St. Bernard.

59.—THE DIVINE MATERNITY.

Mary, of whom was born Jesus.—St. Matt. i. 16.

CONSIDERATION.

LET no one be astonished," says St. Thomas of Villanovo, "that the Evangelists who record, with so many details, what relates to St. John the Baptist and St. Mary Magdalen, speak so little of Mary. It is sufficient that they say she is "Mother of Jesus," for that distinguished quality embraces the most glorious attributes, and embraces them all." "Jesus Christ is God; Mary, His Mother, is Mother of God; in this, is comprised a dignity of an order superior to every other, and comes immediately after that of God." *

O miracle of miracles! A virgin becomes a mother, and mother of her Lord and her God! The Eternal, the Immense, the Infinite, is willing to receive from her life and the cares incident to the state to which He reduces Himself in assuming human nature. Ah! who can conceive how much He raises her, by this alone, above every other created being?

What! addressing Him who is the splendor of the Father, and whom the angels esteem it a glory to serve, cannot she say: "You are my son, I have begotten you," on the day when Heaven showed its great mercy to man. She holds, in respect to Him, all the rights which a mother has over her son. She has all the authority over Him that is inseparable from her quality of mother. In choosing her as mother He assumes the duty of treating her as such; of honoring, loving, obeying, and serving her, and sharing with her His

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* Albertus Magnus.

infinite treasures. The dignity of Mother of God not only raises Mary above everything that has been, but above everything that can be created. Yes, God can create an infinite number of beings superior to those that exist; but be they what they may, they will always be His servants, His slaves, and consequently, as St. John Damascene remarks, there would always be between them and Mary an immense distance, as there must necessarily be, between the Mother of the Lord and the slaves of that Lord.

"Cast your eyes on the highest of the seraphim," exclaims a pious author,* "and that seraph is among the servants of Mary. Between him and God there is an infinite distance, which that Sovereign Master could fill up, to an infinite extent, with creatures each more perfect than the other, yet never could any of them reach the dignity of being His Mother.

"And since, in His wisdom, He proportions His graces to the dignity to which He raises a creature, those with which He endowed and adorned Mary are incomprehensible to all but Himself. Yes, celestial spirits, sublime intelligences, make use of all your heavenly knowledge, and unite all the graces that can be given to simple creatures, I affirm it with confidence, you can think of nothing that will not fall short of what Mary is and of what she possesses, for it belongs to God alone to know all the perfections and all the greatness of the Mother of God."

By her divine maternity, Mary enters into an actual alliance with the Three Adorable Persons; she became, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, the Mother of that same Son, begotten of the Father, from His own substance, from all eternity. In what language, then, have the saints of the Church spoken of this prerogative?

"We are not ignorant of the fact," says St. Bernardine of Sienna, "that our good Mother is queen and mistress of all that God has created; nevertheless, we delight more to call her Mother of God, because, in that privileged title, we discover the origin and the source of all the others."

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* La Pere Gallifet.

"O God," exclaims St. Augustine, "it is to me a subject of profound veneration and holy respect to have occasion to speak of the Mother of your Son, who alone was found worthy to receive, in her chaste womb, the God to whom she was to give birth, and to become the throne, the palace of the Eternal King. It was from her that your divine Son took upon Himself our nature, as it is from you that He drew His origin. O marvellous effect of grace! O dignity which the heart cannot conceive, and which language would in vain try to express!"

"What can be conceived greater than Mary?" asks St. Ambrose. "Who can be greater than she whom He who is Greatness itself chose to be His Mother?" "To others," adds St. Peter Chrysologus, "grace has been given in parts, but to Mary the fulness of grace was given in its entirety. O Virgin truly blessed, who has shown herself greater than the universe, for she contained within her Him whom the universe could not contain; she carried Him who upholds the world; she nourished Him who gives food to all living creatures; she gave hospitality to God, and she obtains from Him, in return, peace for earth and glory for heaven."

"It pleased God to dwell in you, O Mary," said St. Bernard, "since, from the substance of your immaculate flesh, as from the incorruptible wood of Lebanon, the Word built for Himself a house by an ineffable process of construction. It was in you, O singular and well-beloved Mother, that He took repose and poured out the limitless treasures of His heavenly graces. Addressing the Lord of the angelic hosts, you call Him your Son, and He, not disdaining to be called what He Himself chose to be, honors you as His Mother. Ah! what can be more admirable than the affectionate veneration of the Son and the sublime dignity of the Mother? On either side we find cause of profound astonishment; for that a God should be obedient to a woman is a degree of humiliation that has no example, and that a woman should exercise authority over a God, and that, too, the authority of a Mother, is a dignity that has no parallel!"

Besides, all the Doctors of the Church hold the same language, teaching us, with St. Thomas Aquinas, that the dignity of the Mother of God is so great that it approaches to the infinite. But let us listen to the Church celebrating that glorious prerogative, which she has proclaimed at all times, and at all times defended against every form of heresy, and has made the object of a special Feast: "O Mary," she says, "O Holy Virgin, you are blessed and worthy of all praise, for it was from you that Christ came forth, our God, through whom we are saved and ransomed. He who rules heaven and earth, wishing to become man, was enclosed in your womb. You are blessed by God, because you communicate to us the fruit of life." *

"O holy and immaculate Virgin, I know not with what praise I can celebrate your glory, for you have borne in your womb Him who is greater than the heavens.† Grant that all of us who celebrate your holy Maternity may experience the assistance of your powerful protection." ‡ Whilst praying to you hope is revived in our hearts that you will present to your Son our prayers and our tears. He will hear the voice of His Mother; He will lend an ear to her entreaties, and we shall receive, through you, mercy, grace, salvation, and eternal happiness.

APPLICATION.

Let us unite with the Church militant and the Church triumphant in honoring the great Mother of God our Sa-

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* Office of the Maternity of Mary.

† Little Office of the Most Holy Virgin.

‡ Office of the Maternity of Mary.

viour. Let us expand our minds and our hearts, for whatever our praises may be they will fall far short of what they ought to be.

Let us glorify Mary that she merited, by a merit of co-operation, the divine Maternity; that she was prepared for it by corresponding faithfully to the graces she received, and by the exercise of every virtue.

Let us glorify God because He regarded the humility of the glorious Virgin, to whom He has done great things. Let us rejoice that, of all creatures, she approaches nearest to God; that she is the most powerful with that Sovereign Master, who, having given us the Author of grace through her, through her continues to give us every grace we stand in need of.

Let us remember that the Mother of God is also our Mother, and let us invoke her with lively fervor and entire confidence. Let us appeal to her tenderness and goodness, and beg of her to obtain for us the grace to imitate her fidelity to the inspirations of God, her humility, her piety, or, rather, all the virtues by which we may rise to the dignity of our mission, respond to the designs of Providence in our regard, and render ourselves worthy of the glory which God has prepared for us.

PRAYER.

O Mary, through whom the Author of grace has come to us; O Mother of life and salvation, grant that He, who was given to us through you, may, through you, receive us in His paternal arms.

"O Holy Virgin, we ask of you, by the prerogative of your divine maternity, that you may obtain for us the inestimable privilege that the God who has consented, through your co-operation, to become a partaker of our miseries, may, through your intercession, admit us to participate in His eternal happiness and glory." *

See *Résumés*, page 441.

* St. Anselm.

60.—TRAITS OF RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN MARY AND JESUS.

She is the unspotted mirror of God's majesty, and the image of His goodness.—WISDOM vii. 26.

CONSIDERATION.

JESUS CHRIST, being God, can have no equal among creatures, who, whatever attributes they may possess, will ever remain at an infinite distance from Him of whom the Church says: "Thou only art holy; thou only art the Lord; thou only, O Jesus Christ, with the Holy Ghost, art most high in the glory of God the Father." *

Mary, however, bears the most admirable resemblance to that divine Saviour, and, as far as it is possible for a mere creature, she is His perfect image, and shares in all His treasures.

Ordinary mothers are the living types of their children, to whom they communicate, to a certain extent, their own particular feelings and inclinations. This law was applicable to Mary, but with this difference, that it was she who was formed on the model of her divine Son; it was He, the Incarnate Word, the new Adam whom God had in His mind when He created the new Eve, the Holy Virgin, through whom the Saviour was to be given to the world, and of whom it was to be said: "She is the unspotted mirror of God's majesty, and the image of His goodness."

Everything was made by the Word, and in calling into existence her who, in the fulness of time, was to become His Mother, the Word, according to the expression of St. Bernardine, impressed on her His own resemblance. Yes,

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* Hymn, Gloria in Excelsis.

Mary is the most perfect image of Jesus; the mirror that most faithfully reflects His divine traits. To say nothing of the physical resemblance between the incomparable Virgin and the fairest of the children of men, what traits of conformity do we behold! or, rather, in what aspect can we contemplate Jesus without, at the same time, contemplating Mary?

Jesus Christ is Eternal Wisdom come down from Heaven to instruct and save us; now, Mary has so much conformity to Him, that the Church does not hesitate to apply to her what the Holy Ghost has said of that Sovereign Wisdom, and to speak of her in those remarkable words: "From the beginning and before the world was I created." * She was, in fact, united with her divine Son in the eternal decrees of Providence. She was the first object, after Him, that God proposed to Himself in His works, and thus, with Him, she pre-existed before all creatures in the designs of the Most High.

Jesus Christ was promised, prophesied, and prefigured; so, likewise, was Mary with Him and because of Him. The Book of Genesis, when speaking of a Redeemer that was to come, speaks, at the same time, of a woman that would repair the transgression of Eve by crushing the serpent's head. † The royal Prophet beholds, at the right hand of the Sovereign King, the Queen whose true beauty is within, and after whom virgins were to consecrate themselves to God in the temple. ‡ Isaias, when announcing to Achez the great miracle of power and mercy that God was about to work, said to him: "Behold, a Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel." §

"As it was necessary," says St. Chrysostom and St. Gregory of Nyssa, "to prepare man for the ineffable mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, by prophecy, so it

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* Eccles. xxiv 14. † Gen. iii. 15. ‡ See Ps. xliv. 15, 16.
§ Isaias vii. 14.

was necessary to prepare also by the prophets the human mind to believe that a virgin was to be a mother, that a mere creature was to be the Mother of God." Therefore, St. Andrew of Crete, addressing Mary, says, "Every interpreter of the Holy Ghost has spoken of you, O Divine Mother; you are the ordinary subject of their oracles and the object of the allegories they have drawn." In designating the promised Messiah as "a little child—a Son, the flower of Jesse, the rain, the seed, the stone taken from the mountain," the prophets foretold her of whom He would be given, and who, in fact, is called "the Mother of the Child-God," "the Mother of the Son of God," "the root of Jesse," "the mysterious cloud," "the virgin earth," "the holy mountain."

Jesus Christ was prefigured by all the just men of the old covenant, as Mary was prefigured by all the holy women who preceded her. Jesus Christ was also prefigured by symbolical objects, such as the Tree of Life, the Rainbow, the Burning Bush, the Ark of the Covenant, the Golden Candlestick, the Altar of Perfumes, the Rod of Aaron. So it was with Mary, to whom the same symbols also referred, so that the Doctors of the Church, especially St. Ephrem, do not hesitate to call her "the Tree of Life," "the Rainbow," "the Ark of the Covenant."

Jesus Christ is God; of Himself He possesses every perfection; He sees no one above Him; He is essentially Power, Wisdom, Goodness. Mary is the Mother of God, enriched with the gifts of God, and seeing no one except God above her; she is, as it were, an infinite abyss of power, wisdom, and goodness.

Jesus Christ is without sin by virtue of His divine nature: Mary was preserved from every sin by a special privilege. Jesus Christ is the source of all grace; Mary is the channel of grace. Jesus Christ is the Sun of justice, which gives light and salvation to men; Mary is the mysterious moon, reflecting the rays of that divine Orb, and, through them, exercising the sweetest and most salutary influence upon the souls of men.

Jesus Christ is all charity, having loved us so much as to die for us; Mary is also all charity, having, through her love for us, consented to the death of her Son. Jesus Christ is sweetness, humility, and purity itself. Mary is the personification of these virtues, for "in all virtues," says St. Thomas of Villanova, "the Mother was truly the image and reflection of the Son, and the Son the type and the model of the Mother."

We call Jesus Christ King, Master, Lord; we call Mary Queen, Mistress, Sovereign. We adore Jesus Christ as the Uncreated Wisdom; we honor Mary under the title of "Seat of Wisdom." Jesus Christ is our Advocate, our Refuge, our Consolation, our Hope; Mary is also our advocate, "the Refuge of sinners, "the Comfortress of the afflicted."

The Church in her worship unites Mary closely with Jesus. Wherever she erects a temple to the honor of the Son, she raises at least an altar to the honor of the Mother. In all her offices she honors Mary whenever she adores Jesus. How many Feasts in honor of our Blessed Saviour have their counterpart in those which the Church has instituted in honor of Mary! If she celebrates the Incarnation, the Nativity of our Blessed Lord, His presentation, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, does she not also celebrate the Immaculate Conception of the Most Glorious Virgin, her nativity, her presentation, her death, as well as her resurrection and her assumption. If she has the Feasts of the Holy Name of Jesus, of the wounds of Jesus, of the heart of Jesus, has she not also the Feasts of the name of Mary, of the dolors of Mary, of the heart of Mary?

O Holy Virgin, who, then, can worthily celebrate your greatness! How shall we sufficiently honor her whom the Son of God has so highly honored as to make Himself, if we can so speak, identical with her?

APPLICATION.

Let us glorify the Most Blessed Virgin for her union with, and her resemblance to, her divine Son, and for the conformity of her heart to His heart. Let us praise her for having so well imitated, in her conduct, the life of the Model of the Elect, and endeavor to imitate her.

As Christians, Religious, and teachers, should we not, with all these titles, reproduce in ourselves, as far as possible, a resemblance to Him who is our Chief, to whom we are so closely united, and by whom, as a model, we ought to form ourselves as well as our pupils.

Let us not deceive ourselves. This is the fundamental point of the Christian life, and of the life of a Religious. We must imitate Jesus Christ, and express, in ourselves, His thoughts, His words, His actions. He is our Master: let us prove ourselves worthy disciples. We say that we love Him; but love desires to resemble the beloved object, and continually tends toward it. Let us endeavor, then, to acquire this resemblance, keeping always before our eyes, that Heaven shall be given to those only whom the Heavenly Father shall find "conformable to the image of His Son."*

PRAYER.

O Mary, who hast been so enveloped and penetrated with the rays of the Sun of Justice that He has made thee the purest and brightest image of Himself, I bless the Lord that He thus distinguished thee above all other creatures, and arrayed thee in His own divine splendor.

O my good Mother, I rejoice in the treasures you possess, and which I hope to be permitted to share with you. Deign, I beseech you, to remember me, alas! so poor in virtue, and obtain for me the grace to follow you in the footsteps of my adorable Master, until He admit me to share His glory with you in a blessed eternity.

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* Romans viii. 29.

See *Résumés*, page 441.

61.—GLORY OF MARY IN HEAVEN.

And there appeared a great wonder in Heaven, a woman clothed with the sun.—APOC. xii. 1.

CONSIDERATION.

"IN my Father's house," says Jesus Christ, "there are many mansions;"* and of each of these mansions it can be said that "eye hath not seen, . . . nor hath it entered into the heart of man"† to conceive anything comparable to it. The saints, therefore, who occupy even the lowest of these mansions enjoy a glory surpassing all that it is possible for the imagination to conceive. What, then, are we to think of the glory of the saints and angelic spirits that approach nearest to God? And, above all, what of that of the Most Blessed Virgin? "Since the human mind," says St. Bernard, "cannot comprehend the immense glory that God has prepared in Heaven for those who love Him, who can conceive the glory given to that spotless Virgin of whom He chose to be born, and who loved Him with a most perfect love?"

Between the highest of the seraphim and God there is an infinity of degrees, in which that Sovereign Master could have placed innumerable creatures, far superior to the angels; now, everything tells us that it is at the highest of these degrees that the glorious Mary is enthroned; everything confirms the truth of those words of Gerson: "The Virgin Mary is more distinct, in dignity and glory, from the seraphim, than the seraphim are from the cherubim, and from the whole heavenly host. Thus she constitutes, of herself alone, a hierarchy, which comes immediately after the Supreme Trinity of God."

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* St. John xiv. 2.

† 1 Cor. ii. 9.

Has she not been the first of all creatures, and most profusely adorned with divine gifts? Could it, then, be that, after her death and assumption, she should not have the rank she held during life, nay from life's very beginning.

Conceived without sin, through a privilege not shared by any other of the children of Adam; endowed with a plenitude of graces; adorned with the splendors of the Holy Ghost, residing within her; the object of the complacency of the Father; more holy, from the first moment of her existence, than the greatest saints at the close of their lives, and never ceasing to advance in holiness, during more than sixty-three years, how could it be that she should not occupy the highest throne in the mansions of the saints? If the angels paid her homage on earth, saying to her, through one of their number, "Hail, full of grace!" * how much more homage must they render in Heaven, where God gives glory in proportion to the degree of grace?

The Apostles, wishing to express the greatness of Jesus Christ, says: He is as much elevated above the angels "as He hath inherited a more excellent name than they; for to which of the angels hath He said at any time: 'Thou art my Son'?" † But could we not add: to which of the angels hath God said, "Thou art my Mother?" Mary is as much elevated above the angels as the name of "Mother

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* St. Luke i. 28. † Hebrew i. 4.

of God" is more excellent than that of "Messenger of God."

"O Mary," says St. Anselm, addressing her, "you have been exalted above the angelic choirs; you triumph in the joy and glories of Heaven, whence you give your protection to those who honor you, and, by humble supplications, invoke your ever-blessed name."

Heavenly glory is the reward of virtue; but is not Mary the most perfect model of every virtue? Who has ever practiced, as she, the love of God and our neighbor; humility, meekness, purity, obedience, and detachment from creatures? Who has ever been more just than she who reflected, as a faithful mirror, the very justice of God?

If the stewards who made good use of the talents intrusted to them received a double amount, what must she have received, in Heaven, on whom God lavished His graces without measure, and who never permitted a single one to remain unproductive, but from all brought forth all the fruit that they ought to have produced.

"Good measure," says Jesus Christ, "and pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall they give into your bosom;" * but to whom do these words so exactly apply as to Mary, who never ceased to offer to God a measure of fidelity and love full and pressed down? Our divine Saviour, also, says that a cup of cold water given in His name shall not lose its reward. Ah! what, then, must He have reserved for her who gave Him, with a devotion unequalled, and springing from the purest motives, all that she had and all that she was? To whom are those consoling words of the Sovereign Judge that open the gates of Heaven to the just so applicable as to Mary: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, . . . for I was hungry and ye gave me to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink." †

It is manifest, therefore, from the very words of Holy

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* St. Luke vi. 38. † St. Matt. xxv. 34, 35.

Scripture, that Mary occupies the highest place of glory in Heaven, as unanimously taught by all the doctors of the Church.

"God alone," says St. Andrew of Crete, "can worthily pronounce the eulogy of Mary, for human language is incapable of praising her who is 'clothed with the sun,' who has the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars, and the brightness of whose glory dazzles even the inhabitants of the heavenly Jerusalem?" "There is no greatness," says St. Chrysostom, "like to that of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary; neither the prophets, nor the apostles, nor the martyrs, nor the patriarchs, nor the angels, nor the thrones, nor the dominations, nor the cherubim, nor anything created, can reach the excellence of her who is the Mother of God."

"O prodigy," exclaims St. Anselm, "at what an immeasurable height do I perceive the throne of Mary! No, there is nothing higher than Mary except God. You are greater in dignity, O my Queen, and more powerful, than the apostles, the martyrs, the confessors, and virgins. You are Queen of all the saints and of all the angelic hosts, because you are Mother of our Redeemer and Spouse of God Himself."

"It is becoming," says St. John Damascene, "that whatever the Son possesses the Mother should also possess. Such, therefore, is the glory that she possesses, that it surpasses all which the most sublime intelligences can conceive: Heaven will forever admire it, but will never comprehend it."

Moreover, the Church proclaims, in a thousand ways, the glory of the Most Blessed Mother of God, whom she honors with a devotion of a higher rank than that which she gives to the angels and saints, and whom she invokes under the titles of "Queen of angels," "Queen of all saints," "Queen of heaven."

APPLICATION.

Let us give thanks to God for the glory of Mary in Heaven. Let us exalt His holy name for honoring His humble handmaid, for the recompense He has given to her who was the most perfect image of the divine Master, and, next to Him, the most complete model of the elect.

Let us rejoice that Mary is placed so near the throne of God, at the right hand of her divine Son, who delights in lavishing on her the infinite treasures of His goodness. Let us consider that, if she is so exalted, it was because she was ever docile to the inspirations of divine grace, and practiced all the virtues in a manner the most perfect. Let us then strive to imitate her, if we desire to participate in her glory. Like Mary, let us be humble, and the Lord, regarding our humility, will raise us from the midst of our destitution, and rank us with princes, "with the princes of His people." * Let us be pure, and Jesus Christ has assured us "we shall see God;" † let our hearts be detached from the things of this world, and the Sovereign Master will bestow on us the riches of Heaven, of whose value there is nothing on earth that can give us any conception. Let us never forget, if we wish to share in the glory of Mary, that we must endeavor to practice the virtues that Mary practiced; that it is by following in the footsteps of our good Mother that we shall reach those happy mansions where she awaits us, and where we shall join in the chorus of angels and saints in celebrating her greatness.

PRAYER.

O Mary, Queen of Heaven, accept the homage of your poor, humble servant. Your glory, O divine Mother, is to me a subject of inexpressible joy, as well as of fervent thanksgiving to God, who, in you, above all others, has

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* Ps. cxii. 8. † St. Matt. v. 8.

crowned His gifts in crowning your merits. With what sentiments of gratitude and joy do I praise the Lord for His unbounded munificence toward you! And with what admiration do I congratulate you on your virtues, by which you made yourself worthy of His favors!

Vouchsafe, O my good Mother, to intercede for us with God, and obtain for me the grace to imitate your virtues, so that, having, like you, glorified Him on earth, I may be admitted to glorify Him, in you and with you, forever in Heaven. Amen.

See *Résumés*, page 442.

62.—GLORY OF MARY ON EARTH.

All generations shall call me blessed.—St. LUKE i. 48.

CONSIDERATION.

LET us consider what glory is given to Mary throughout the world, and also what fulfilment has been given to those words of her Canticle: "All generations shall call me blessed." All the generations that have passed have esteemed it a happiness to extol her greatness, to celebrate her prerogatives, and offer to her the homage of their most profound veneration; all have re-echoed the words of the angel, "Hail, full of grace," and those of Elizabeth calling her the "Mother of my Lord," and adding, "Blessed art thou that hast believed." *

The torch kindled in her honor has never ceased to shed its light upon the world, and all the efforts of heresy and hell to extinguish it have been but as feeble gusts of wind, which have served only to increase its brightness. To what epoch, since the dawn of Christianity, can we turn in which we will not hear the Church and her doctors glorifying the Virgin Mother? St. Irenæus, Tertullian, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Chrysostom, St. Ephrem, St. Anselm, St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, St. Bernardine of Sienna, St. Peter Damien, St. Liguori — in a word, all the doctors, of all ages, have delighted to dwell on the glories of Mary. Ah! what praises, for example, were decreed to her at the council of Ephesus by St. Cyril of Alexandria, and by the other fathers of that council! "O Mary, Mother of God," he exclaimed, "we bless you as the treasure of the universe, the inextinguishable torch, the crown of virginity, the sceptre of good doctrine, indestructible temple, abode of Him whom no habitation can contain.

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* St. Luke i. 45.

"We praise you who contained in your pure and virgin womb the Immense, the Incomprehensible; you, by whom the precious cross of the Saviour is exalted and revered; you, by whom Heaven is victorious, angels rejoice, devils are expelled, and the tempter is vanquished; you, through whom the divine light enlightens those 'that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death;' * you, by whom 'kings reign.' † Ah! who can worthily praise you?"

And this sublime enthusiasm has never become cold, for in every age of the Church there have been souls devoted to Mary who, gratifying the cravings of their hearts, have given expression, in one form or other, to the sentiments of St. John Damascene: "O Virgin, treasure of sanctity, fountain of justice, living and animated Heaven, ocean of grace, you are the hope of Christians, the Queen of angels, the Mistress of all creatures; vouchsafe to make us participate in that glory and happiness which you enjoy in heaven, where you are raised up to the throne of your divine Son."

But the glory of Mary is not only perpetual; it is also

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* St. Luke i. 79. † Prov. vii. 15.

universal. It is not with her as with the distinguished names of the great ones of this world, who, if they do not pass into oblivion, survive only in the memory of a particular class of people, which must, necessarily, be restricted. Everywhere throughout the world Mary is praised, admired, loved, and blessed. Her hymns are sung in the heart of the forests and deserts as well as among the crowds in the cities; barbarous tribes, as well as civilized nations, offer her their tribute of respect and veneration. Every country possesses monuments that speak to us of Mary and proclaim her glorious titles.

Not only is Mary herself glorified, but so also is everything that bears any relation to her. Her holy name is the object of a special devotion; it has its Feast in the Church, and there is no name, after the adorable name of Jesus, that is handed down from age to age with so pure and radiant a lustre. Her images are multiplied beyond number, venerated by all persons, and placed next to those of the Son of God; the few words of hers that have come down to us are deeply pondered, commented on, and religiously repeated, with sentiments of the most profound admiration; the objects that belonged to her, and of which we possess some small relics, are esteemed by the piety of the faithful as priceless treasures, and, on her account, we respect all those who are consecrated to her and who wear her livery.

This glory of Mary, so permanent and universal, is not less admirable, considered in its expression. Ah! here, indeed, we have reason to exclaim: "This honor is he worthy of, whom the King hath a mind to honor."* And, in fact, to whom, humanly speaking, does this refer? To an humble daughter of Juda, an unknown Virgin, the wife of a poor carpenter; and yet the honor paid to her is so great that, compared to it, all the honor paid to the most powerful monarch in the world is as nothing. Are not her churches counted by thousands, and her servants by millions? There is no church without, at least, one altar dedicated to Mary. In how many places are her pictures and statues exposed to public view? How many books are written to make her known, loved, and praised? How many feasts are instituted in her honor, and with how much solemnity are they observed? How many persons, how many families, how many religious orders, how many nations even, consecrate themselves to her, and put themselves under her protection? Yes, O Holy Virgin, your glory outshines every other glory, and every one that is enlightened by reason and faith can, with the beloved Apostle, behold you clothed with the sun, with the moon under your feet, and on your head a crown of twelve stars.

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* Esther vi. 11.

But why this incomparable glory! Ah! it is because Mary is Mother of God, and by that fact alone is raised in dignity above all that is not God; it is because she was preserved from original sin, and adorned with all the gifts of grace; it is because she was the most virtuous creature that has ever lived, or ever will live; and it is proper that glory should be the reward of virtue; it is because, sitting on the highest throne, next to that of her divine Son, she is the object of the veneration of the angels and saints; it is because the Church militant should unite with the Church triumphant in giving honor to the glorious Virgin, and because, by her prayers, she is all-powerful over the heart of God, from whom she can obtain for us infinite treasures of divine grace. It is thus that the devotion we pay to Mary gratifies a deep-seated longing of our hearts, and that, in itself and in its effects, it is pre-eminently beautiful, sweet, consoling, and salutary.

Yes, O Holy Virgin, you are worthy of all glory, because your greatness and your merits are beyond the power of language to express. Therefore, with St. Bernardine of

Sienna, we say: "O woman, endowed with graces above every other creature! You are the Mother of God, the Queen of the universe, the channel of every grace, and the ornament of the Church. You are the gate of Heaven, the joy of the elect, the object of God's benign complacency. We can only lisp, like little children, in proclaiming your glory. Supply, O gracious Mother, our deficiency, that we may worthily praise you in the mansions of everlasting peace.

APPLICATION.

Let us bless God, the first source of the merits and perfections of Mary, and give Him glory through her, the greatest work of His hands. Let us practice with ardor the devotions to this Most Blessed Virgin, and zealously excite others to do so. How great will be the service we shall render to our pupils, and what merits shall we procure for ourselves, if we only train them to be true children of Mary!

Above all, let us glorify this good Mother by imitating her virtues, for, in truth, this is the best way in which we can testify the sincerity of our devotion. Let us not be satisfied with calling her "Mother most pure," "Virgin most prudent," "Mirror of justice," "Seat of wisdom;" let us earnestly labor to produce in ourselves her justice, her humility, her purity, her prudence, her wisdom. Let us also glorify her by placing ourselves under her protection, for, being chosen Queen of mercy, she delights to fulfil all the functions of her high office, and cover, with the shield of her protection, all those who have recourse to her.

PRAYER.

"O Most Holy Virgin, hear our prayers, and vouchsafe to grant us a share in the spiritual treasures you so abundantly enjoy. The archangel salutes you as full of grace, all nations call you blessed, all the heavenly hierarchies praise you, and we also, sojourners in this valley of tears, say to you, 'Hail, full of grace! the Lord is with you;' pray for us, O Mother of God, our Sovereign Queen." *

Grant that, through your all-powerful and merciful protection, we may truly honor you by walking in your footsteps, and thus add to your glory here below that of showing your mercy to us until we are called to participate in your glory in heaven.

See *Résumés*, p. 442.

63.—THE POWER OF MARY.

My mother, ask; for I must not turn away thy face. — I KINGS ii. 20.

CONSIDERATION.

MARY, having been raised to the dignity of Mother of the King of kings, shares His power, and, in a certain sense, can say with Him, "All power is given to me in heaven and on earth." † "From the instant," says St. Bernardine, "when she consented to the Divine Maternity, she merited to receive a dominion over all creation, and the sceptre of the world was placed in her hands. She is the true Queen of the world, and all who obey God also obey her." Therefore the fathers ‡ of the Church say to her: "O glorious Virgin, you dispose of the treasures of your Son at pleasure: dominion and power belong to the daughter, the Spouse, the Mother of the King of kings."

Mary has received all power from her Divine Son, and, as innumerable facts testify, the very elements obey her, hearts yield to her influence, and the course of events is changed in its direction at her command. The spirits of evil tremble in her presence, for they realize the words addressed to the serpent: "I will put enmities between thee and the woman. . . . She shall crush thy head."* The angel of pride and wickedness struggles in vain beneath her feet; he is powerless against her, as well as against those whom she protects.

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* St. Athanasius. † St. Matt. xxiii. 18. ‡ L'Abbé Guerric.

St. Liguori, speaking of the power of the Mother of God, represents her as speaking thus: "Strength is my inheritance; God has given it so that I may dispense it to my servants. It is through me that they bring their senses under subjection, and subdue their passions so as to render themselves worthy the everlasting joys of heaven." "Mary," he adds, "is that tower from which depend a thousand bucklers; she is, truly, to her servants who have recourse to her in their struggles, an impregnable fortress, supplied with every kind of weapon, offensive and defensive, necessary for us in our conflicts with the enemy of our salvation."

And how could it be that earth and hell are not subject to her when the very angels and saints acknowledge her authority? "Your crown, O Holy Virgin," says the blessed Amadeus, "gives you the glorious right to reign in heaven itself." "O Most Holy, Most Pure, Most Immaculate Virgin," says St. Ephrem, addressing her, "you are more elevated than all the other inhabitants of the heavenly mansions, and superior in glory to the cherubim. You are the Sovereign Mistress, raised above everything that is not God."

The power of Mary knows no limit. If Abraham and Moses, by their prayers, commanded God, if we may so speak, how much more efficacious will be the supplications of Mary, who is infinitely dearer to Him than the great patriarch of believers or the greatest of the prophets could possibly be. With what justice, then, is she called an all-powerful intercessor!

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* Gen. iii. 15.

God, who became her Son, grants Mary all that she wishes. As He was subject to her on earth, He is still subject to her in Heaven, by giving her all that she asks. Her prayers are the prayers of a Mother, which cannot be refused. The new Solomon, He places her on a throne at His right hand, and continually says to her: "My Mother, ask and you shall be heard. I open to you the treasures of my graces: dispose of them as you will. At your solicitation I will change my anger into clemency and pity; I will suspend my vengeance; I will hold back the thunderbolts of justice; I will disarm death; I will chain down the evil spirit; I will lavish the gifts of grace upon men, and to your servants will I open Heaven." He who is omnipotent by nature makes Mary omnipotent by grace, and, as He Himself revealed to St. Bridget, He refuses no favor in Heaven to her who never refused Him anything on earth, thus worthily testifying His appreciation of her maternal care. "Ah," says St. Liguori, "we know that the Most Blessed Virgin owes an infinite debt of gratitude to her divine Son for having chosen her to be His Mother; still, we are permitted to say that that divine Saviour has contracted, on His part, a sort of obligation for the human nature He received from her, and it is in acknowledgment of that favor that He honors and exalts her by granting all she asks for."

St. Methodius, in addressing Mary, expresses the same thought: "The Sovereign Lord of all things," says he to her, "wished to be your debtor when He received from you that human nature which He had not before. To you alone belongs this privilege; your influence with Him, therefore, surpasses that of all the saints."

On this point all the Doctors of the Church hold the same language. "O Holy Virgin!" exclaims St. Germanus of Constantinople, "you hold a Mother's power over God, and it cannot be that He will fail to hear you." "All power," says St. Peter Damien, "has been given to you in Heaven and on earth, and everything you wish is done." "As Mother of God," writes Gerson, "Mary has received the fulness of grace, not only for herself, but for all mankind."

St. Bernardine of Sienna does not hesitate to affirm that everything is subject to the dominion of Mary, so that her divine Son receives her solicitations as if they were commands. "You are certain, O our Lady," says St. Bernard, "to obtain everything you ask of our Lord Jesus Christ." Yes, Mary has but to wish, and her desires are anticipated; and it was because this is so that Albertus Magnus represents her as saying: "Entreat me to wish, for what I wish is done."

"You can save us all!" exclaims St. John Damascene, "for your authority as Mother gives irresistible force to your supplications." And does not the Church herself call her "Virgin most powerful," and invoke her in these words: "O Mary, Holy Mother of Jesus Christ, by your prayers, always acceptable to your Son, obtain for us grace for eternal life."

But are not facts the most irresistible evidence? Let us recur to the marriage-feast at Cana in Galilee, at which Mary, by a mere intimation of her wishes, obtained what she desired, though it required a miracle to grant it. Let us also call to mind the numberless miracles that the Blessed Virgin has herself wrought since her glorious assumption into Heaven: miracles in the order of nature, attested by every kind of monuments, as well as by numberless *ex voto* offerings; miracles in the order of grace, which caused St. Cyril of Alexandria to exclaim: "By you, O Mary, Mother of God, the tempter is driven off, idolatry destroyed, the faithful baptized and anointed with the oil of gladness, churches are founded, and nations drawn to repentance."

How many sinners have, with contrite hearts, returned to God, through the power of Mary! How many just has she kept in the straight path! How many saints, now in Heaven, joyfully proclaim that it was by her powerful assistance, and through her protection, they entered on, and persevered in, the narrow path that conducts to eternal life!

APPLICATION.

Let us praise the Lord for having conferred such power on His Most Blessed Mother, who, being our Mother also, regards us with maternal tenderness, and desires nothing more than our true happiness. Let us renew our confidence in obtaining aid from on high. The prayers of Mary are all powerful, and, if we only sincerely desire it, she will pray for us, and obtain for us the necessary grace to vanquish the enemy of our salvation, to defeat his schemes, to steadily follow the path of virtue, to fulfil our destiny and merit eternal happiness.

Let us, then, constantly beg her to intercede for us as well as for those for whom we desire to pray. Let us, so to speak, invoke her without ceasing, but particularly in times of temptation, adversity and sickness.

Let us enter into the spirit of St. John Damascene when he exclaimed: "O Mother of God, my hope in you is a shield that renders me invincible. Strong in your powerful aid, I shall obtain a victory over my enemies by interposing between them and me your powerful protection, as a buckler of defence against their assaults." May we hear her addressing us in the words which St. Liguori speaks for her: "My children, look at me, for in beholding me you shall see your victory."

PRAYER.

Give me, O Mary, Queen of Heaven, strength in my weakness, and intercede for me with your divine Son. Oh, exercise in behalf of your child the all-powerful influence you possess over His adorable heart. You know the wants of my poor soul and what I stand most in need of. Obtain the pardon of my sins, the courage to persevere earnestly in my sanctification, and, particularly, the grace of final perseverance by which I shall work out my salvation, and be permitted, from the foot of your throne, to praise and bless you for the protection I ask of your clemency and goodness. Amen.

See *Résumés*, page 443.

64. — GOODNESS OF MARY.

She is . . . the image of the goodness of God. — WIS. vii. 26.

CONSIDERATION.

GOD is infinite in all his perfections; still we can say that His mercy surpasses all His works. It is more especially in His infinite goodness that we contemplate Him, and for this reason we delight to apply to Him the epithet "Good." Now, of all creatures that have ever lived, Mary is the most perfect image of God; goodness and mercy must, therefore, predominate in her above all her other qualities, and stand out as distinctive characteristics.

"Ah!" exclaims St. Bernard, "why should we fear in our weakness to address Mary? We see nothing repulsive or austere in her aspect as we have been taught to behold it. She is all sweetness. Study," said he, "with as much diligence as you may, the narrative of the Evangelists, and if you find in them anything that would indicate harshness or unkindness in the character of Mary, then I consent that you may fear to approach her; but if, on the contrary, you shall find nothing in this Most Blessed Virgin, as will be the case, but condescension, goodness, sweetness, and mercy, no longer hesitate, but render grateful thanks to Him who has so mercifully given us such a mediatrix.

"Mary is the Mother of the only Son of God. What a sublime idea of her goodness does not this glorious title present to our minds! Ah! could we find anything else than love in her who was the living tabernacle in which the Son of God, who is Love begotten of Love, chose to dwell?"

Speaking of his confidence in Mary, St. Anselm says: "I behold, with the eyes of faith, the angels, the prophets, the holy virgins, but I can see none in heaven so powerful as the Mother of my Lord; for this reason have I chosen her as my patroness." "Mary," adds St. Liguori, "is a Queen full of sweetness and clemency, and the only one who devotes herself to the alleviation of the miseries of her people. She is the Queen of mercy to pardon, not the Queen of justice to punish."

We can, therefore, apply to the Blessed Virgin Mary the words which the royal prophet spoke of the Messiah: "Thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness;" * for she received the sacred unction from the hands of God Himself, and she received it for the consolation of the unhappy children of Adam, who have every reason to rejoice that they have in heaven a Mother at once compassionate and tender, who shields them with her maternal protection, and guides them through the storms of life.

"When Mary," says St. Thomas Aquinas, "conceived

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* Ps. xliv. 8.

and brought forth the Eternal Word, half of the kingdom was given to her as an inheritance, so that she might become Queen of mercy, as her Son is King of justice." "The Lord," adds Gerson, "has thus divided, if we can so speak, His kingdom into two parts: the dominion of justice He has reserved to Himself, that of mercy He has yielded to His Mother."

The heart of Mary, being of all hearts the most conformable to that of Jesus, is an abyss of sweetness, goodness, and charity, whose depths none but God can fathom. No man knows what an immense share he has in the sentiments of tenderness overflowing in the heart of that Mother who is called, by so just a title, "the Mother of mercy," and with whom no mother, in the natural order, can be compared! Ah! who can measure her love for her servants, and even for sinners, whom she does not cease to consider her children so long as they live, and repentance and restoration to grace are possible!

Besides, everything proclaims the goodness of Mary: the universal sentiment of the faithful who represent the Most Blessed Virgin in all the attributes of sweetness, benevolence, and the most amiable charity; the opinions of the holy fathers, who unite in celebrating her goodness; the authority of the Church, which so frequently, in its liturgy, addresses her as "Most sweet Virgin," "Most amiable Mother;" and, finally, innumerable facts which attest her solicitude for the welfare of man.

Everything illustrates the meaning of that passage of St. Bernard in which he says, "Mary has become all to all, and, by her immense charity, has made all mankind her debtors. She has opened to all the bosom of her mercy, so that all may receive of its fulness; that the captive may be set free, the sick healed, the afflicted comforted, the sinner pardoned, and the just be crowned with an abundance of grace."

"What man breathes," says St. Liguori, "who has not enjoyed the light of the Sun? or what man lives who has not experienced the compassion of Mary, and shared in her favors?" "I am," said she to St. Bridget, "Queen of Heaven and Mother of mercy. I am the joy of the just, and the gate of succor through which sinners go to God. There is no one living to whom I refuse my mercy, no one who has not received some grace through my intercession, even were it only to be less violently tempted by the devil."

Oh! with what justice, then, does the Church celebrate, in her hymns, the goodness of Mary! What thoughts and sentiments, for example, are more natural or just than that anthem in honor of the august Virgin: "Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor, banished children of Eve; to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn, then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this, our exile, is ended, show unto us Jesus, the fruit of thy womb, O clement, O pious, O sweet Virgin Mary!" *

What an army of Christians joyfully proclaim that they have received, from the goodness of Mary, numberless and most precious favors! Which one of us can take a retrospect of his past life without acknowledging singular proofs of her protection? Is it not to her, after God, that we are indebted for all the graces we have received, since, according to the opinions of the Doctors of the Church, all graces are communicated to us through her maternal hands? "O great Queen," said the Abbe Rupert, addressing her, "it is by your protection that sinners are saved, and, because their salvation is your work, they will constitute your crown in Heaven."

Ah! could we only interrogate the saints who have passed to glory, they would all tell us with one voice: "Mary

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* Ant.: Salve Regina.

looked with compassion on us, and supplicated her divine Son in our behalf. It is to her intercession we are indebted for our return to the path of virtue, our victory over Satan, and our final perseverance. Therefore we now glory in extolling her goodness forever and ever.

APPLICATION.

In unison with all the choirs of the heavenly hosts, let us celebrate the goodness of Mary with transports of admiration and gratitude. Let us say, with St. Bernard: "As for us, O Most Blessed Virgin, who glory in being numbered among your servants, we felicitate you as much on your other virtues as we congratulate ourselves on your mercy. We praise your virginity; we exalt your humility; but, miserable sinners as we are, we love your mercy above all the other virtues with which you are adorned. It is this we have most constantly before our mind, because we have need to invoke it most frequently. No one can fathom its depth or measure its breadth. It covers all ages; it spreads over the earth; it goes down to the darkest dungeons of death; it mounts to the azure vaults of the sky."

Let us, then, renew our confidence in Mary. "Let us fly to this 'Virgin Most Clement'; let us press around her whence salvation shall come. Let not the heinousness of our sins keep us back. Let us remember that if she has been crowned 'Queen of mercy,' it is that sinners, without distinction, may be saved by her protection." *

Let us, however, labor under no delusion. She cannot save us unless we try to save ourselves; unless there is, on our part, a correspondence with the graces she procures for us, and we thus show that we really desire our own sanctification.

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* St. Liguori.

PRAYER.

"O Mary, Mother of mercy, you are the refuge of sinners, the harbor always open to the shipwrecked, the Mother of the orphan, the redemption of captives, the solace of the sick, the comfort of the afflicted, and the salvation of all. In you we confide, O Most Blessed Virgin; mercifully shelter us beneath the wings of your bountiful protection. Prostrate at your feet, we beseech you so to plead for us before God, that He may spare us the rigors of His wrath which we have provoked by our sins." *

Grant that, through your intercession, we may, by imitating your virtues, merit to obtain favor with your divine Son, when we shall be summoned to His presence, so that we may be admitted to celebrate, in Heaven, your goodness and mercy, to which we shall owe our eternal happiness.

See *Résumés*, page 443.

65.—MARY OUR MOTHER.

Behold my Mother.—ST. JOHN xix. 27

CONSIDERATION.

MARY is our Mother, because she is the Mother of Jesus Christ, with whom we make but one, as the members make but one with their head, and because this divine Saviour has given her to us as such on Calvary.

"According to the flesh," says St. Augustine, "Mary is the Mother of Jesus Christ our Head; and, spiritually, she is the Mother of those who are His members, that is to say, of us all, for by her charity she co-operates in the birth of the faithful into the Church."

* St. Ephrem.

"It cannot be doubted," says Bossuet, "that the sinless Virgin is the happy Eve of the New Covenant; that she has had the same share in our salvation that Eve had in our ruin; that is to say, that she comes next after Jesus Christ; and, as Eve was the Mother of those subject to death, so she is the Mother of all the living."

"Mary," say St. Ephrem and St. Anselm, "gave life to the world, so that she is, at the same time, the Mother of life and the Mother of the living; the Mother of reconciliation and the Mother of the reconciled; the Mother of the Redeemer and the Mother of the redeemed."

"Yes," says St. Liguori, "Mary is truly our Mother, not according to the flesh to give us the life of the body, but spiritually, giving us the life of the soul, which we had lost by sin, and which we recover through Jesus Christ."

"The Blessed Virgin became our Mother when she merited to conceive in her womb the Son of the Eternal Father. By consenting to the incarnation of the Word, she contributed, in the most efficacious manner, to the work of our redemption; and, by the very act of that consent, she devoted herself to our salvation in such a manner that, from that time, she may be said to have borne all mankind as a mother bears her children." *

The second act of her wonderful love for us was when, with a heart broken with sorrow, she offered up her only Son, on Mount Calvary, to the Eternal Father, as a holocaust for our sins; when Jesus Christ, about to die, pointing to the beloved disciple who represented all the faithful, said to her: "Woman, behold thy son," and added, addressing him: "Behold thy Mother." That divine Saviour, then, spoke as God, as is evident from His calling her woman and not my Mother, and his omnipotent words operated the effect He intended.

From that moment of grace every Christian has the right

* St. Bernard.

to call Mary by the sweet name of Mother, and to call himself her child; the decree that authorizes him to do so is sealed with the blood of our Saviour; it was proclaimed from the height of the cross, and it was at the foot of that throne of mercy that it was accepted by the Most Holy Virgin, on her own part, and by St. John in the name of the Church.

In adopting the beloved disciple as her Son, Mary adopted all mankind, and from that moment she became entirely devoted to the ministry of love which she had undertaken.

It is the duty of a good mother to love her children, to be solicitous in providing everything useful for them, to nourish them, to instruct them, to protect them, and to devote herself to their happiness. From these characteristics of a good mother, let us understand how much reason we have to call Mary our good Mother!

She loves us as never mother loved the child of her affections. The words of Jesus: "Woman, behold thy son," made her transfer to us, as far as that could be, the very love she had for Him, and to each of the faithful she might say, as she did to St. Alphonsus Rodriguez: "The love I have for you is as much superior to that you have for me as heaven is raised above earth."

Her heart is all chastity. She does not show herself to us but under the aspect of sweetness, and we cannot form a conception of her except as a fountain overflowing with love. The Church represents her to us only as the image of the goodness of God, and addresses her under every form of language: "Amiable Mother, Mother of mercy, sweet Virgin, you are our hope, our refuge, our consolation."

How great is her solicitude for the faithful, and what other mother has ever watched over her children as she does! Let us remember that it is through her that all heavenly gifts come to us, and that there is not a single instant in which we are not the object of her maternal attentions. Let us remember, also, that it is to her we are indebted for so many special graces with which Heaven has favored us, and particularly for that of our vocation to a religious life.

Yes, by the graces she obtains for us, by the influence she exercises upon earth, Mary assists, nourishes, enlightens, and rejoices our souls; and each of us can say to her, with St. Germanus of Constantinople: "You are, after God, O loving Mother, the heavenly dew that alone tempers my suffering; the light that dispels the darkness of my understanding; my guide in my pilgrimage here below; my strength in my weakness; my consolation in my tears; my refuge in my danger."

Mary defends us against the enemies of our salvation, so that, if we invoke her with fervor and confidence, they can never vanquish us. "When Mary sees her children exposed to the storms of temptation," says St. Liguori, "she shelters them in her arms, nor ceases to watch over them until they have reached the haven of safety."

No, no, we do not understand the devotedness, the care of our good Mother. Oh! what would be our fate if she had not become our advocate; if she had not pleaded in our favor; if she had not supported us in her arms to prevent us from falling; if she had not driven from us the spirit of evil that sought our ruin; if she had not supported our weakness, and inspired us with renewed courage?

But does not the very thought that the Mother of God is also our mother, fill our souls with joy and confidence! "As Mother of God, she is omnipotent with her divine Son as our advocate; and as our Mother, she must have deeply at heart our happiness and our salvation. This double maternity, divine and human, is like a bridge of mercy placed between us and God, by means of which we can go to God by the same way by which He vouchsafed to come to us." *

* M. A. Nicolas.

APPLICATION.

As Mary shows herself to be our most loving Mother, it becomes us to prove ourselves her obedient children by a faithful discharge of all our duties as such.

Let us cherish a truly filial love for her, resembling, as much as we can make it, that which the infant God bore for her. Let us love her with a most tender, most ardent, and most sincere love; let us love her with a love that is ever solicitous to please her; vigilant in avoiding all that can grieve her, faithful in doing all that she requires or wishes us to do. The glory of a mother rests, above all else, on the goodness of her children; let us, then, delight in honoring Mary by our virtues.

"Do you wish," says St. Bonaventure, "to secure for yourself the favor of the Queen of Heaven? Imitate her, as far as you can, in every action of your life. In this way you will prove yourselves to be her worthy children, and merit, at the same time, that she will affectionately remember you and treat you as her true children."

Let us never place ourselves out of the presence of that sweet Mother, meditating on her, examining our conduct under her eyes, invoking her unceasingly, venerating her images, and consecrating all our actions to her.

Let us have recourse to her in every difficulty, and let us do so with confidence. "Children," says St. Liguori, "have always their mother's name in their mouths. At the least danger, the least fright, they cry out: 'Mother! Mother!' O Mary," adds he, "most loving of mothers, that is what you ask of us. You wish that, like children, we should call upon you in every danger, and run for shelter to your arms."

In union with that great saint, let us implore the assistance of Mary under all circumstances, but particularly that she may be with us at the hour of death. Let us beg her to show herself our Mother at that last moment, to receive our soul when it leaves the body, and conduct it to heaven.

PRAYER.

O Jesus, our adorable Saviour, what a singular favor you have bestowed on us in giving us your Most Holy Mother to be our Mother! Complete your work, and grant that we may love, honor, and serve her with all the love, zeal, and fidelity of those among her children who have most perfectly glorified her.

And you, O Mary, our good and kind Mother, vouchsafe to ask of your Divine Son the grace we solicit, and grant, by your all-powerful intercession, that, loving and serving you during the course of this transitory life, we may merit to love you, see you, and bless you through the ages of eternity.

See *Résumés,* page 433.

66. — THE PATRONAGE OF MARY.

We will praise and we will call upon thy name. — Ps. lxxiv. 11.

CONSIDERATION.

THE patronage of Mary is the exercise of the functions of her divine maternity, and, as such, it is the union of the care she took of God, our Saviour, who became her Son, with that which she takes of us, who are her children by adoption; it is, especially, the protection she gives us, either in the order of nature, or, more particularly, in the order of grace; a protection which should ever be the subject of our meditation and love, and which the saints and

Doctors of the Church have delighted to extol, bless, and glorify.

The patronage of Mary in our regard is, then, a consequence of her divine maternity. "God, whose gifts are without repentance,"* having once willed, says Bossuet, to give us Jesus Christ, through Mary, that order is never changed; and thus it is, and always will be, true, that having once received, through her, the source of grace, we shall still receive, through her mediation, the varied applications of it in all the different conditions that make up the Christian life.

Her maternal charity having so much contributed to our salvation, in the mystery of the Incarnation, which is the universal source of grace, she continually contributes to it in all the other operations that flow from this ineffable source.

A protector must have the power to do good, the will to do it, and the knowledge of the wants of those whom he protects. Now are not all those things found, in the most perfect degree, in Mary? The mediatrix appointed by God, she is the depository of His treasures and the channel of His graces; the Mother of Jesus Christ, she possesses over His divine heart a power of intercession that knows no limits; the image of that sweet and loving Saviour, she reproduces His goodness, His tenderness and liberality; the Mother of mankind, she desires our happiness still more than we can wish it ourselves; illumined by the brightness of the divine light, she has the most complete understanding of the wants of our souls.

Therefore the pious Lansperg puts into the mouth of our Lord these consoling words: "Children of Adam, who live in the midst of so many enemies, and are subject to so many miseries, honor with a special devotion my Mother and yours; I have given her to the world to be a sure refuge in all tribulations. Let no one fear her, or tremble to approach her, for I have created her so good, so merciful, that she knows not how to be harsh to those who implore her help or to withhold assistance from those that ask it."

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* Rom. xi. 29.

Let us behold, in Mary, our patroness, and put all our confidence in her. We are weak and miserable, but she is powerful and rich, especially for us. "The abundance of grace in her is so great," says St. Thomas, "that not only does it superabound in her, but she can enrich all men from its abundant treasures. In every danger we can find safety in her, in every conflict assistance. She urges us herself to have recourse to her protection, saying: "In me is all hope of life and of virtue." *

If, during her sojourn on earth, she enjoyed the singular privilege of obtaining everything from her divine Son, and showed herself so solicitous to do good, how much more solicitous and powerful is she now, when, reigning with Him, her prerogatives have received their consummation, and all the treasures of Heaven have been placed in her hands?

The patronage of Mary can never be wanting to those who sincerely desire to obtain it, and who, for that purpose, study to imitate that Holy Virgin and invoke her with fervor. Therefore St. Bernard says to all such: "By following Mary you shall not go astray; while praying to her you shall never lose confidence. If she sustains you, you cannot fall; if she protects you, you have nothing to fear; if she leads you, the journey will become easy; if she is propitious, you will arrive at the happy object of your voyage, that is to say, at the harbor of salvation.

"Extol Mary, glorify her clemency, honor her as the source of grace, the mediatrix of salvation, the restorer of the world. No man has ever invoked her in his necessities

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* Eccles. xxiv. 25.

without being heard, for her love for us and her power know no limit.

"Who, then, O blessed lady, will ever be able to measure the length, breadth, height, and depth of that charity? It comes to the help of all who invoke it; its effects fill the universe.

"Let our souls, devoured by thirst, hasten to drink at that fountain; let our misery address itself to that great source of mercy!"

With that illustrious Doctor of the Church, let us comprehend the nature and necessity of the protection of Mary, and do everything that depends on us that it may be exercised in our behalf. Oh! my God, what would become of us if that protection failed us? Poor, weak, miserable, as we are, assaulted by so many enemies, we have the most absolute need of grace, and that is given us by the intervention of Mary. Guilty of so many faults, it is, indeed, necessary that some one interpose between us and the Divine Judge, so that He may not punish us in His anger. But who can discharge that office unless Mary, His Mother and ours?

Her patronage is exercised not only toward individuals but also toward societies. She is the patroness of the Church, which proclaims that it is by her all heresies have been overcome; that it is by her aid she has come forth glorious from all her struggles.

She is the patroness of empires and kingdoms, and particularly of France and of the United States, which have been solemnly placed under her protection. She is the patroness of all religious orders, who refer to her the glory of their foundation, their preservation, and their progress. She is the patroness of our Institute, which has been consecrated to her from its commencement, which invokes her every day under the title of protectress, and which, in special proof of the honor it gives her in that quality, celebrates, with the greatest solemnity possible, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception and that of her patronage.

Yes, the protection of Mary is extended toward all. "That divine Mother," says St. Amadeus, "is compared to the plane-tree, because as that tree throws out its branches on every side, so the Blessed Virgin covers, under her refreshing shelter, all the children of Adam, and screens them from the heat of the sun and the fury of the tempest."

Happy, then, are her servants! They need not fear a sudden or unprovided-for death; they will enjoy spiritual treasures in abundance, until that loving Mother, crowning the work of her protection, obtains for them the grace of final perseverance.

APPLICATION.

Let us celebrate with gratitude and joy the patronage of Mary, which is exercised in so many ways and to so many persons, and which is so liberally extended toward ourselves. Let us, with transports of the most holy gratitude, thank that loving Mother to whose goodness we are indebted for so many favors, and, amongst others, for the singular grace of our holy vocation.

Let us do all that depends on us to deserve a continuance of her protection. To that end let us purify our intentions; let us seek not our own interests, but those of her divine Son; let us devote ourselves to all our duties for her, and not for ourselves or for the praise of the world; and then we may be sure that she will help us to accomplish them.

Let us strive to imitate her virtues, remembering that our patroness is also our model, and that nothing more disposes her in our favor than our fidelity in following the path she has traced out.

Let us have recourse to her in all our spiritual or temporal wants. Let us supplicate her to help us in our sufferings, our temptations, our seasons of despondency. Let us invoke her with the most lively fervor and most filial confidence, saying to her, with the Church: "O Mary, show yourself our Mother, and help us." Let us, above all, implore her protection and presence at the hour of our death, so that, through her, we may find favor before the Sovereign Judge, and be admitted to bless her through all eternity for the protection she granted to us during the time of our exile.

PRAYER.

"Holy Mary, come to the aid of our misery, help our weakness, console our affliction, dry our tears, pray for the people, intercede for the clergy, and for all souls that live virtuously, so that all who celebrate your glorious name may experience the effects of your protection." *

O Blessed Virgin, who hast merited to bear in thy womb the Saviour of the world, obtain for us, we beseech thee, the superabundance of grace during life and at the hour of our death, so that we may attain to eternal salvation.

See *Résumés*, page 444.

67. — MARY OUR ADVOCATE.

Our life is in thy hand. — GEN. xlvii. 25.

CONSIDERATION.

AT the remembrance of our sins and the rigors of the divine justice, our soul is seized with fear, and we exclaim with David: "If thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand it?" † We feel that we have need of a mediation of mercy between God and us.

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* St. Augustine. † Ps. cxxix. 3.

Jesus Christ is the great Mediator with His Heavenly Father, and, if such were the order of His divine providence, He would suffice alone; but it was not His will that He should be alone in that office of charity, and He has, therefore, associated with Himself His most holy Mother. "In beholding Him," says St. Bernard, "men fear His majesty, for if the prophet extols His mercy,[*] he also proclaims His justice,[†] and if, as the Apostle says,[‡] He has learned by what He suffered to be compassionate and merciful, He has also, and will ever have, the power to judge us.

"We have, then, need of a mediation with the Mediator Himself; and that mediation is exercised by Mary. The Lord, who omits nothing that can contribute to deliver us from our misery, wished, when appointing this sweet Virgin our mediatrix, to dispel our apprehensions and banish all our fears.

"Perhaps you fear, O men, to approach the heavenly Father, and, like Adam, terrified at His voice, you feel inclined to fly from His presence; but He has given you, as a mediator, Jesus Christ, who is all mercy. Perhaps you do not dare to have recourse to that Saviour-God, who, while making Himself our brother, did not cease to be God; then have recourse to Mary. I say it unhesitatingly, she will be heard by the Son, and the Son will be heard by the Father; that is the ladder of sinners; it is my great, my true, my only hope."

Thus, from this place of pilgrimage in which we are placed, we have sent before us our advocate, who, in her twofold character of Mother of our Judge and Mother of mercy, pleads, urgently and efficaciously, for our salvation. She implores our forgiveness by the merits of the labors, the blood, and the death of Jesus Christ, in which she can claim the rights of co-operation and also by her own merits. The new Esther, she has so pleased the Sovereign King that not only has she merited her crown as Queen, but has also obtained favor for all her race, condemned to eternal death.

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[*] Ps. cxliv. 9.

[‡] Ibid. cx. 3.

[‡] Heb. iv. 15; v. 8.

"Men," says St. Augustine, "have but one advocate in Heaven, and that advocate is Mary, who is all filled with charity." "She is," adds St. Richard of St. Laurence, "so prudent, so earnest in the defence of our interests, that her divine Son cannot condemn any sinner whom she defends or protects."

Therefore, St. Thomas of Villanova says to us: "Dry up your tears, you who are in tribulation; take courage, ye timid and faint-hearted; the powerful Virgin, Mother of Him who is your Judge and your God, is also the advocate of the human race: a skilful advocate, who knows every means of appeasing God; a universal advocate, who rejects no one, and from whom all receive some consolation."

Mary reminds Jesus of what she has done for Him as Jesus shows to His Father His wounds and His cross, and thus together they are successful: the Son, by the right of sovereignty; the Mother, by the efficacy of her prayers.

She interposes between divine justice and all the unhappy descendants of Adam, in a more excellent way than Abraham when soliciting pardon for Sodom and Gomorrah, or Moses when praying for the guilty Israelites. She makes it her happiness to plead the cause of every one that has recourse to her.

"Let us bless the Lord," says St. Bonaventure, "for this, that the most powerful among the saints is our advocate, and an advocate the most zealous, the most loving, and the most generous that it is possible to conceive." According to the beautiful expression of St. Germanus: "Mary can never feel weary of defending us." "She is continually present," says St. Amadeus, "at the throne of divine mercy, to ask favor for us, and it seems to me that I hear her saying, as Samuel did formerly to the Israelites: 'Far from me be this sin against the Lord, that I should cease to pray for you.' "* The rainbow which the Apostle St. John† saw round about the throne of God signified the Blessed Virgin, who is continually pleading with our Lord to make Him revoke, or at least mitigate, the decrees of His justice.

At the sight of the crimes that desolate the earth, he who has faith is astonished, with St. Chrysostom, that the thunderbolts of Heaven do not burst from all sides upon men. "They would burst, beyond all doubt," says Pere le Jeune, "had we not in Mary a powerful advocate, who appeases the anger of her divine Son, suspends His vengeance, and turns aside from our guilty heads the scourges of His justice."

A zealous advocate, she is equally a generous advocate, and there is no man, however guilty he may be, whose cause she refuses to take in hand, if he invokes her and sincerely wishes it. Therefore, in the abandonment of a perfect filial confidence, St. Liguori said to her: "O mediatrix between sinners and the Sovereign Judge, fulfil in my case the duties of your office. Do not object that my cause is too hopeless; there is no hopeless cause for an advocate such as you. I believe that the greatest sinner will be saved if you undertake his defence, and I know, also, that you are too merciful to refuse to burden yourself with mine."

There is nothing, then, that can rest on a stronger foundation than the language of Gerson, when he says: "You are, O Mary, our mediatrix and our advocate, because God has resolved to give us all graces through your hands. We have recourse to you: can you reject us? No, for you have never refused your assistance to any one who, in the sincerity of his heart, had laid before you the wants of his soul. Full of that confidence, we hope that you will always

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[*] 1 Kings xii. 23. [†] See Apoc. iv. 3.

succor us, so that we may be able to arrive at the happy end of our pilgrimage in this world."

APPLICATION.

Let us repeatedly thank divine Providence for the mission of salvation confided to our good Mother, proclaiming, as it does so loudly, the clemency, goodness, and generosity of our heavenly Father. "Is it not because He wishes to exhaust His mercies in our favor, that, after having given us Jesus Christ as an advocate with Himself, He gives us, also, Mary as an advocate with that divine Mediator." *

In union with the Church, let us honor the Blessed Virgin under the title of Advocate, which is so dear to her heart, or under those of "Mother of mercy," "Refuge of sinners," "Help of Christians," which equally recall to mind her ministry of protection in our regard. Let us merit her interest in our behalf by fervent prayers, and, above all, by the faithful accomplishment of all she requires of us.

Let us induce those over whom we can exercise any influence, and particularly such as we see disposed to sadness, disquietude, scruples, and faint-heartedness, to put all their confidence in that Mother so loving, so devoted, and so powerful. Let us be assured we shall thus render them a signal service, and we shall gladden the heart of that charitable mediatrix, whom nothing pleases so much as the most entire confidence on the part of her children.

PRAYER.

"O Blessed Virgin, whose prayers can meet with no refusal, whose clemency never rejects a suppliant, and whose mercy has never been found wanting to those who have had recourse to it, deign to offer up our prayers to the Lord, so that He may accept them, and that we may obtain, through your intercession, what we ask of you with so much confidence.†

* St. Liguori. † William of Paris.

"Glorious Mother of God, our mediatrix and our advocate, reconcile us with your Son, recommend us to your Son, present us to your Son. By that favor you have found, by the prerogative of Mother of God which you have merited, by the mercy to which you gave birth, grant that He who, by your co-operation, deigned to make Himself a sharer in our weakness and misery, may bring us also, by your intercession, to share in His glory and happiness." *

See *Résumés*, page 445.

68. — MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS.

By thee He hath brought our enemies to naught. — JUDITH xiii. 22.

CONSIDERATION.

THE Church honors Mary under the glorious title of "Help of Christians." No title is more worthily bestowed, for the Mother of God is our help under all circumstances in which we can be placed; a help indispensable and eminently salutary; a help granted to all those who sincerely ask it, and one which is as prompt as it is certain.

Mary is our indispensable help because grace is given us through her mediation, and because, without grace, we can do absolutely nothing toward our salvation. It is Mary who dispenses the fruits of the merits of Jesus Christ, which are all our hope. "With me are riches and glory," says she to us, "glorious riches and justice." † God has given me power that I may assist my servants. It is by me that they control their senses and subdue their passions.

What would become of us if our good Mother ceased, even for a single instant, to protect us? Weak as we are, blind as we are to our own good, and encompassed by so many dangers, we would follow the path of vice, we would wander in the darkness of sin, we would be through life, the sport of the devils, and, after death, the companions of their sufferings. "In the same manner," says St. Liguori, "as a stone that is not supported would roll downwards from abyss to abyss, so would the soul that lost the support of Mary fall into the abyss of sin and be lost."

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* St. Bernard. † Prov. viii. 18.

"A child newly-born," says St. Bonaventure, "cannot live without the care of its mother, so neither can we live to salvation unless Mary protects us. Children of Mary, let us keep close to her, and not let her go until we have received her blessing in Heaven."

Let us invoke her at all times, but especially in our moments of trial; "for her prayers," says St. Andrew of Crete, "obtain for us all the graces we stand in need of to practice virtue and overcome the efforts of the enemies of our souls."

"Terrible as an army set in array," * she alone can defeat the legions of hell.† Her holy name is to them like a thunderbolt.‡ Therefore the Doctors of the Church apply to her those words addressed to Judith: "The Lord hath blessed thee by His power; because by thee He hath brought our enemies to naught." §

"Every time," says St. Bridget, "that the devils attack a person who implores the help of Mary, they fly away, trembling with fear, at the least sign she makes them." How many Christians have seasonably experienced the effects of her merciful aid! How many in the most terrible temptations, have found at the foot of her altar, like St. Francis of Sales, victory over the enemy and peace of soul!

It is for this reason that prayers arise to her from every quarter of the globe. Her help is implored by all ages and all ranks of society; the young and the old, the rich and

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* Cant. vi. 3. † M. Olier. ‡ St. Thomas. § Judith xiii. 22.

the poor, the seaman, the artisan, the soldier, all implore her help, and none ask it in vain. She it is whom the orphans call their mother, the captives their deliverer, the pilgrims their guide, the afflicted their comfortress, the sick their physician.

O holy Virgin, who ever left your altars without having been favorably heard? It is on that account that the grateful piety of Christians has raised sanctuaries to you in every country in the world, and that incense everywhere rises in your honor.

A universal helper, Mary comes to the aid of all who ask her; and first of all, to the help of the Church, which she assists, protects, and defends with a holy, motherly solicitude, and which the Church thus gratefully proclaims in her liturgy: "More than once, Christian nations, when oppressed by hostile armies, have seen this powerful Virgin descend from Heaven and come to their relief. The ancient monuments of our fathers tell us this, and the trophies that adorn our temples attest it, as well as the feasts which religion renews every year. We have had recourse to Mary our hope; she has succored us, and we have been delivered." *

Mary is the help of states, towns, and families, which are placed under her protection, and which she has preserved or delivered from so many evils. She is the help of religious orders, which truly honor her, and from which she removes everything that can injure them, at the same time that she obtains for them the blessings of grace, and even those temporal blessings that are necessary for their perpetuation and the fulfilment of their providential end in the Church.

She is the help of each of us, personally; for which one of us has not reason to exclaim: "Mary has lavished upon

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* Office of our Lady "Help of Christians," 24th of May.

me proofs of her motherly love; her favors to me are more numerous than the moments of my existence."

No one invokes that charitable mediatrix without receiving assistance. "Show me a man," says St. Bernard, "upon whom the rays of the sun do not shine, and then, perhaps, you will be able to show me one who is not the object of Mary's protection." Doubtless the help she gives us is not always conformable to our wishes; but it is on that account only the more precious, for she knows our wants, and it is only with a view to our greater good that she does not help us in the manner we ask her.

Her assistance is no less prompt than certain. In her love for us, that good Mother hears our prayers immediately; often even she anticipates them, as in the case of the marriage-feast at Cana, and as the Church designs to teach the faithful when it applies to her those words said of Wisdom: "She preventeth them that covet her, so that she first showeth herself to them."*

How much reason then St. Ephrem had to exclaim: "I salute you, O Virgin Mother of the Sovereign King, consolation of the human race, bulwark of the faithful, secure harbor wherein we are sheltered from the fury of the tempest, refuge of sinners, strength and protection of souls in danger of being lost, sweet mediatrix between God and men."

APPLICATION.

Let us return thanks to our Lord for having appointed his Mother "Help of Christians," for having given us, in her, the means of obtaining all that is necessary for our sanctification.

Let us bless Mary for her kind and maternal protection to the Church, our Institute, our parents and friends, and particularly to ourselves. Shall we ever be able to thank her sufficiently for her solicitude and liberality?

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* Wisdom vi. 14.

Let us invoke her under all circumstances in which we may be placed, and, above all, in times of suffering. "When the devils," says St. Thomas of Villanova, "come like birds of prey to pounce upon us, let us imitate the chickens which, at sight of the vulture, run for protection under the wings of their mother. Let us not stop to reason with the thoughts that they suggest; let us make haste to put ourselves in safety under the mantle of Mary." "When the sea is stormy," says St. Liguori, "and the waves of temptation run high, let us call upon Mary, and say to her, as the disciples did to Jesus: Save us, we perish." *

Let us implore her with fervor and confidence, remembering that she has all power over the heart of her divine Son; that, drawing from the treasury of infinite mercy, she cannot fail to give us all necessary aid, and that her liberality is as immense as the favors she has at her disposal.

Let us strive to merit her assistance by our fidelity in obeying her and our diligence in following her example; by that means we shall ever lead virtuous lives until we reach those abodes of peace where, at the right hand of Jesus Christ, reigns this glorious "Help of Christians."

PRAYER.

Remember, O most pious Virgin Mary, that it has never been heard of, in any age, that those who implored thy powerful protection were abandoned by thee. Therefore, O holy Virgin, animated with the most lively confidence, I cast myself at thy sacred feet, most earnestly beseeching thee to adopt me as thy child, to take care of my eternal salvation, and to watch over me at the hour of my death. Oh! do not, Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise my prayer, but graciously hear and grant the same. Amen.†

See *Résumés*, page 445.

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* St. Matt. viii. 25. † Memorare.

69. — MARY THE PROTECTRESS OF OUR INSTITUTE.

She hath delivered from sorrow them that attend upon her. — WISDOM x. 9.

CONSIDERATION.

THE protection of Mary is extended not only to individuals but to Christian societies, and, in a special manner, to religious societies. For this reason the founders of religious orders have had special regard to the powerful protection of Mary, for they knew it to be absolutely necessary for the establishment and the preservation of regularity, fervor, union, and zeal in their respective societies; that it would prove an invincible armor to shield them from danger, and the most efficacious means to fulfil the end of their foundation.

Faithful and zealous in his devotion to Mary, and understanding, in an extraordinary degree, how immense was her love, and how much we need her maternal assistance, our venerable Father had nothing more at heart than to honor her and to induce others to honor her, and to place under her loving patronage the Institute of which he was the founder. To this end he made, as his first step in his great work, and in company with his Brothers, a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Liesse, there to consecrate themselves to the Queen of Heaven, to implore, on their behalf, her influence with God, and to choose her as Patroness and Superior of the Institution.

He renewed this consecration, this request, and this election every day, and we cannot doubt that the principal object of so many fervent prayers that he continually offered up to Mary was to entreat her, urgently and with tears, to show herself a Mother to him and his Brothers, to succor them in their wants, to make their work prosper, and to enrich them with the gifts of her goodness. In all his sufferings he had recourse to her as to his refuge, and he threw himself with confidence into her arms, as a child into those of its mother. He undertook no affair of importance without recommending it to her, whilst he concluded none without putting its fruits or results under her safe keeping.

Placed under the patronage of Mary by our venerable Father, his holy purposes have been renewed and enjoined on us by all our Superiors and all our general Chapters, or, rather, by all our predecessors, who have been so faithful in invoking Mary, in asking her intercession in their own behalf, for their brothers and their pupils, in confiding to her their hopes and fears, and in recommending to her their interests in time, but, above all, in eternity.

We have, then, been founded to give to Mary this title of "Protectress of our Institute," under which we invoke her daily, and whose signification she so admirably realizes.

Ah! who can say what she has done for us! Who can say what our Institute owes to her solicitude, from the first moment of its existence up to this hour! Let us recall to mind what opposition was made to our venerable Father; how many obstacles his undertaking met with; what tempests threatened the frail bark of which he was the pilot! How could it have continued its course without being submerged, had it not been protected by the "Star of the Sea," had not Mary herself directed it, and saved it from every danger? Is it not to her protection that the Institute must attribute its escape from the whirlwind of revolution that spread such universal desolation throughout France, and its being able to rise again, in the first days of calm, and devote itself to the work of regeneration that had then become the primary want of modern society?

The Institute has passed through innumerable trials, and has always been efficaciously helped by the Holy Virgin, who is the treasurer of God's graces, and whom St. Ephrem calls "the support of Religious and Anchorites." It has established, supported, and developed itself under the shelter of her patronage, and has been able to accomplish its mission for the good of souls and the edification and consolation of the Church.

As it is through her hands that all graces intended for men pass, she is, after God, the inspiring author of all the vocations by which our novitiates have been established and fed, and has thus perpetuated our society. Yes, it is she who, whispering to the hearts of all those whom the Lord has called to it, has made them hear, in the very depths of their souls, the salutary invitation to abandon the world and enroll themselves under the banner of religion. It is she who has blessed our establishments, and, if there is not one that has not been erected under her auspices, neither is there one that has not experienced the effects of her solicitude.

Who among us is not the object of special care on the part of that loving Mother? Who among us, reflecting on what he has been, does not acknowledge that she has never ceased to help him? As Religious, we are her children of predilection, on whom her eyes are constantly fixed. If we pray to her, she comes immediately to our assistance, and if we do not pray to her, she inspires us with the holy thought of prayer, so anxious is she that we may be perfect, and promote the glory of God.

When, in our trials, we have recourse to her, she consoles and encourages us; and if she suffers any cause for tears to remain, she does not fail to make them less bitter, while making them serve as a means to our sanctification. She communicates to us, in superabundance, all the graces of light and strength necessary for us to discharge the duties of our holy state, to advance in perfection, to observe our vows and our rules, to practice the virtues we stand in need of as teachers, to produce fruits of salvation in our souls, and make us correspond to all the views of the God of goodness who has called us to His service.

No, we do not know how great are the tenderness and care of that dear Mother in our regard. We do not know what part she has in the good that is done in our Institute, and by means of our Institute.

How many Brothers have found, at the foot of her altar, light in their doubts, strength in their weakness! How many, on her feast days, have felt themselves renewed in fervor and fidelity to all their obligations! Her image alone, on which we can always cast our eyes, is a sweet and powerful exhortation to us to practice the virtues of our state; and when we look upon it with faith, we feel heavenly rays issue thence upon our mind and heart; enlightening and warming our souls, penetrating us with the ardent desire of leading a holy, angelic life, that we may honor the Queen of angels, by generously embracing the practice of humility, obedience, poverty, and patience, and give her glory by thus imitating her who is the Queen of virtues, and the most perfect image of our divine Master.

APPLICATION.

Let us appreciate the great favor of the patronage of Mary, and return thanks to God for having appointed His Most Holy Mother to be our Mother and protectress.

Let us thank our queenly patroness for all that her love for the children of the Venerable de la Salle has inspired her to do; let us bless her for that loving protection that she never ceases to extend to them.

Let us honor her by an ardent devotion, veneration, gratitude, prayer, and imitation of her virtues, such as becomes Religious, who have received so many favors from her, and let us offer her this homage in union with the interior dispositions of our Venerable Father, and all our Brothers who have offered it to her down to the present hour.

Let us have recourse to her by fervent prayers, gushing from hearts that are sensible of our own many necessities, and from our filial confidence in the protection of that divine Mother, who loves us with an inexpressible love, and who is all-powerful with her divine Son. Let us pray to her for our Superiors, our Brothers, our novices, our pupils; let us pray to her for ourselves personally, begging of her, above all things, the grace of fervor and perseverance.

Let us not forget that, for a Religious, the best means of securing the protection of Mary is to conduct himself as a Religious; to observe his rules faithfully; to keep his promises inviolate; to be, by his piety, his exactitude, his modesty, his obedience, the edification of his Brothers and the support of his order.

PRAYER.

We salute you, O Mary, our Mother and protectress, and we thank you, with transports of gratitude, for the inexpressible favors we have received, and still receive, from your kind and generous hands. Vouchsafe, O Blessed Virgin, to continue your protection to us. Be with us in the future as you have been with us in the past, and grant that our Institute, maintaining its regularity and fervor, may be always a joy to the Church, an edification to the faithful, and a true consolation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to your Immaculate Heart. Grant that each one of us, profiting by the graces you obtain for him, may, on every occasion, and in every circumstance, lead the life of a true Religious and a Christian teacher; may fulfil the work of his own sanctification; produce abundance of fruit among his pupils; and, at last, attain to the possession of those heavenly treasures which are the recompense of the true disciples of your divine Son.

See *Résumés*, page 446.

70.—MARY THE REFUGE OF SINNERS.

My mercy and my refuge.—Ps. cxliii. 2.

CONSIDERATION.

AT the remembrance of the number and grievousness of our sins, and at the thought of the divine justice, our souls are seized with terror, and we exclaim with St. Anselm: "Whither can I fly to hide myself from the eyes of the Sovereign Judge? Neither the East nor the West, nor the depths of the sea can offer me a secure retreat." But let us not forget that an asylum is offered to repentant sinners—a safe asylum, always open, and open to all—an asylum of easy access, where we are invited and urged to take refuge: that asylum is Mary, the clement Virgin, "who," says St. Chrysostom, "was chosen from all eternity that those whom her divine Son, in the rigor of justice, could not pardon, might be saved through her mercy."

Let us represent to ourselves a Sovereign pursuing a rebellious subject; this latter, apprised in time, runs to the Mother of his King, casts himself upon his knees, and, by his entreaties and tears, touches her heart and obtains her protection. Soon the Prince arrives, but, at the sight of his mother stretching her hands over the head of the criminal, and imploring mercy for him, he stops and listens to her entreaties; his anger calms down, he pardons the traitor, and restores him once again to favor.

All this is but a feeble image of what happens, every day, in the spiritual order; for how many sinners, to escape the anger of the Sovereign King, have had recourse to His divine Mother, and, through her mediation, have been restored to grace! Therefore it is that the Church gives

Mary the title of "Refuge of sinners," thus authorizing us to consider her as, in some sort, resembling those towns and temples set apart, by special laws, in ancient times, in which every criminal who entered might find a secure asylum.

Mary most truly fulfils all the signification of that title, so consoling to us, and we can all exclaim, with St. Bonaventure: "I will seek the Lord Jesus, I will enter into His wounds, to hide myself from His wrath. If my Redeemer drives me far from Him because of my sins, I will go and throw myself at the feet of His Mother, and I will not rise from thence until I have obtained my pardon; she cannot but take pity on my misery, and her compassion will move the Heart of her Son to forgive me."

"Mary," says St. Bernard, "is called Queen of mercy, because she opens, at her pleasure, the abyss of divine mercy, and every sinner, however great may be his crimes, may be saved by her protection."

St. Anselm, speaking on the same subject, says: "The Blessed Virgin has been raised to the dignity of Mother of God more even for sinners than for the just. Then, since she is in some sense indebted to sinners for her divine maternity, how can I despair of forgiveness, however enormous may be my crimes?"

Therefore, he addressed this admirable prayer to Mary: "In the midst of the terrors that pursue me, what mediatrix shall I invoke with more fervor and confidence than her who bore in her womb the reconciliation of the human race? From whom can I hope with more certainty for speedy assistance, than from her who was the Mother of universal propitiation? O thou, through whom a sinful world has been reconciled with an angry God, take pity on me, or show me a heart more merciful to which I can have recourse, or a power superior to yours and which can better respond to my confidence."

"It is of the Blessed Virgin," says St. Liguori, that it is written: "The law of clemency is on her tongue,* and every prayer that passes her lips is like a decree emanating from our Lord by which He obliges Himself to show mercy towards those for whom she prays."

There is no moment of time when we cannot throw ourselves into the arms of that loving Mother, and a sinner, were he even at his last moment, and did he see hell open at his feet, could still find a refuge in her, and salvation through her. There is no crime that forbids us to have recourse to Mary with confidence; and a soul guilty of all the crimes that have sullied earth for centuries, would still have reason to hope in the protection of her to whom St. Augustine said: "You are the only hope of sinners; it is by your intercession, O Holy Virgin, that we expect pardon of our iniquities, and the eternal recompense."

However detestable a sinner may be, "O Mary," adds St. Bernard, "you do not reject him if he breathes a sigh toward you, and, with a penitent heart, implores your sweet intercession. And it is no wonder, O Queen of clemency, that the sanctuary of your heart is so abundantly steeped in the oil of mercy, since the inestimable work of mercy which God had resolved upon, before the beginning of the world, for our redemption, was first accomplished in you."

If, according to the law of nature, a mother devotes her cares chiefly to that one of her children whom she sees sick or infirm, how could she who is our Mother, according to the law of grace, fail to succor those among us whom she sees most wretched and most deserving of pity. There is no mother who, knowing that a mortal enmity exists between two of her children, does not do all in her power to effect a reconciliation. Now, Mary the Mother of Jesus is also Mother of guilty man; there is nothing, then, she would not do to reconcile them. Besides, does she not know that Jesus wishes not the death of sinners but their conversion; that He came upon earth, principally, for them; that to redeem them, He shed the last drop of His blood; that His divine Heart is consumed by the desire of seeing them entirely freed from sin and made worthy of the glory that He has merited for them.

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* Prov. xxxi. 26.

Moreover, do not facts loudly attest the assistance Mary gives to sinners? How many of them owe their return to God to her! How many, like St. Andrew Corsini, came to draw strength at the foot of her image, to break the bond of Satan, and cast themselves into her maternal arms! How many have been held back by her merciful hand when about to plunge into the abyss of despair! How many Christian mothers, who, having recommended to her their children gone astray in the ways of wickedness, have had the consolation of seeing them return and persevere in the paths of virtue!

Are not these things facts of daily occurrence, happening everywhere throughout the Church, and proving that Mary is truly the Queen of mercy, the image of the goodness of God, the divine shepherdess calling the stray sheep to her, and leading them with joy to the fold, where they will again find peace, plenty, and happiness?

APPLICATION.

Let us bless God, who, in His infinite mercy, and in His desire to help us, has given us Mary as the mediatrix of reconciliation. Let us bless our good Mother for exercising that ministry of clemency and charity, and let us thank her for the mercy she has shown to us.

If, alas! it should happen to us that we have the misfortune to offend her divine Son, let us make haste to beg her to have compassion upon us, and obtain our pardon and the grace to return at once and forever to virtue. Let us ask, through her intercession, the dispositions necessary for receiving the Sacrament of penance with all its fruits. Let us pray to her for the conversion of sinners, and especially of those for whom we feel a particular interest. Let us, for this purpose, address ourselves to her immaculate heart, through the mediation of which so many miraculous conversions have been effected.

Would that our prayers might contribute to the conversion of souls! We should thus glorify God, console the heart of Jesus, rejoice the angels and saints, and acquire more claims to the protection of Mary for the remaining days of our exile upon earth, and especially for the hour of our death.

PRAYER.

"O Mother of God and my hope, I am, alas! one of those stray sheep whom the Eternal Word came down from heaven to earth to seek, and who now entreats you to bring him back to the fold of your divine Son. The price of my ransom has been paid, and it only remains to apply the merits thereof to my soul. O Mother of mercy, do not refuse your compassion to a soul for which Jesus shed all His blood." *

I am a sinner, but I deplore it, and I know, O Queen of clemency, that your goodness exceeds my wickedness. Behold my repentance and my confidence, and, receiving me into your maternal arms, place me again in those of Jesus, there to remain forever. Amen.

See *Résumés*, page 446.

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* St. Liguori.

71.—MARY THE COMFORTRESS OF THE AFFLICTED.

I myself will comfort you.—ISAIAS li. 12.

CONSIDERATION.

CHILDREN of Eve, and guilty of her crime, we wander in this valley of tears, exiled from our true country, weighed down beneath the heavy yoke of every kind of affliction of body, mind, and heart. Happy is he who, in the midst of these deplorable miseries, turns his eyes toward Mary, for God has appointed her the comfortress of the world!"* He has filled her with His own spirit of goodness and charity, and has appointed her to comfort those who are oppressed by sadness.

In making Himself her Son, the Incarnate Word appointed her His comfortress, for it is the duty of a Mother to soothe, as far as possible, the sufferings of her children. Jesus wept in the crib, shedding—according to the expression of St. Francis of Sales—not as yet the rain, but the dew of His tears; and it was the hand of His most holy Mother that dried them. It was Mary and Joseph who consoled him in His exile, and who imparted the greatest solace to His heart torn with anguish at the sight of the sins of men.

It was in the arms of Mary, it was on the heart of Mary, that in childhood or youth He sought relief in all the sufferings of His soul.

It was so, likewise, on the day of His sacrifice—in that hour of His greatest agony, when from the cross He cried out: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" * for then His eyes rested upon Mary, who, with St. John, was overwhelmed with compassion for His sufferings.

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* St. Liguori.

Comfortress of Jesus Christ, she ought to be such to the members of Jesus Christ, to the faithful who compose His mystical body, whom He considers as a second-self, and over whom He appointed her as Mother, at that last moment, when, about to enter into His rest and glory, He had no more need, personally, to be comforted.

When He said to her: "Woman, behold thy son," He filled her with that affection and compassion for us which she had for Him, so that what she could have desired in His regard, she desires in ours. On that account she is eager to lighten our sufferings, to cheer our hearts when depressed, to revive our courage and confidence; and such is her zeal in that mission of charity, that St. Bonaventure says to her: "You have, O Mary, such solicitude for the unfortunate that it seems as if you had no other desire than to assist them, no other occupation than to comfort them."

"Our good Mother," says St. Liguori, "has so great a compassion and so lively an affection for us, that she does not even wait for our prayers to begin to succor us." What, then, is her eagerness to come to our aid when we pray to her!

"O worthy Virgin!" exclaims St. Bernardine of Sienna, "you are the Mother of mercy, the treasure of graces, the source of piety. Ah! could you reject us, you who never failed to assist any one who invoked you in the sincerity of his heart?"

"To whom could I have recourse!" exclaims St. Anselm, "if the only asylum of everlasting pity was closed against me! Yes, I ask, to whom could the afflicted go to weep over their misery and misfortunes if not to thee, O our Lady, who art truly and infallibly the 'Mother of mercy'?"

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* St. Matt. xvii. 46.

"O most holy Mother of God," says St. Ephrem, "you are the hope of the despondent, the consolation and guide of all who mourn amid the darkness and misery of this vale of tears; you are our support, our joy, our safety; you are the tree of life, contentment, and holiness, the source of true consolation, and the fountain of all graces."

Mary is the comfortress of all men, under every affliction and every sorrow. There is no one on earth who cannot say to her with the blessed Thomas à Kempis: "When I am seized with fear at the sight of my sins; when languor and grief close up my heart; when the storm of temptation rises, and the waves of passion dash against me; when an unforeseen sickness comes upon me, it is to you, O my sweet and beloved Mother, I have recourse, for you console and sustain all who fly to you for refuge."

Yes, whatever be the cause of our sorrows — sicknesses, contradictions, temptations, dangers, loss of those who are dear to us — Mary applies a healing balm to every wound of our hearts; there is no bitterness that we cannot sweeten if we pray to her, and the consolation she gives is never opposed to our true interest.

How many souls in trouble or grief of heart have come to pray at the foot of her statue, and, like St. Francis of Sales, have left there all their anguish of heart!

How many, from the very depths of misery, have offered up prayers to her, and she has dried their tears!

Have we not a touching and universal proof of this in the numberless *ex voto* offerings that cover the walls of her privileged sanctuaries, for are they not monuments of her goodness toward the unfortunate?

The compassion of Mary extends even beyond the grave, for we cannot doubt that this Queen of mercy assists the souls of her servants detained in purgatory, and that she helps to soothe or shorten their sufferings, by the application of the prayers of the faithful in their behalf. "She has,'' says St. Bernardine of Sienna, ''a certain power over that prison, into which she descends to console her children, and lighten their sufferings.''

It is then with reason that the faithful, of all times and all countries, honor Mary under the title of ''Comfortress of the afflicted,'' and say to her, with the devout Blosius: ''O Virgin Mother of God, who could help loving you? You are our light in darkness, our joy in sadness, and our help in danger. Hail to thee, hope of those who have no other hope. Be thou blessed to whom the Son of God has given so much power, and whose heart is only tenderness and mercy for us.''

APPLICATION.

Let us return the most lively thanks to our Lord for having appointed His Mother ''Comfortress of the afflicted;'' for having charged her with that office which so well supplies our wants in this life of warfare and tears.

Let us extol the Blessed Virgin for exercising that ministry of grace, and opening to all men, to use the expression of St. Liguori, the bosom of her mercy, where the slave finds ransom, the sick health, the sinner pardon, the troubled soul calm and peace. Let us bless her for her charity toward us and toward our neighbor.

Let us pray to her for those who suffer, and whose number is, alas! so great, in this pilgrimage of tears.

Let us pray to her for our parents and kindred, who are subjected to so many trials in the world, and trials, sometimes, so deeply afflicting to the heart. Let us pray to her for those who are most forsaken by the world, and for those who suffer most. Let us pray to her for the suffering souls in purgatory, so that she may obtain for them, by the means she has at her disposal, either deliverance or an alleviation of their sufferings.

Let us pray to her for ourselves in all our sufferings.

When grief comes to us, under any one of its thousand forms, let us have recourse to our good Mother in heaven; let us entrust to her our cares and sorrows, and beg her to come to our assistance. No, let us never fail to go to her. One fervent glance with the eyes of the soul on her sweet and loving face, is often sufficient to dispel the cloud of sadness that gathers on our brow.

Let us ask, through her intercession, not so much a cessation of our sufferings, as the grace to draw profit from them to our spiritual advancement; for the Christian, and with still more reason the Religious, should not forget that the path that leads to Heaven is no other than the road to Calvary, and that those will reign with Jesus Christ who, while in this world, shall have voluntarily suffered with Jesus Christ.

PRAYER.

O Blessed Virgin, you are my hope and my support, and it is from you that I expect succor.

Often, alas! in this wilderness of sorrow, my heart is steeped in anguish and my eyes are filled with tears. Oh! in those moments, above all, remember that you are the comfortress of the afflicted, and come to my help. Deliver me from my sufferings, or, if such is not the will of your divine Son, obtain for me that I may support them in a way meritorious for heaven, so that, having combatted and suffered here below, as should every true disciple of the God of Calvary, I may at last reach those abodes of peace and joy where there is no more sorrow, and where I shall celebrate your love and charity with all the transports of an endless gratitude.

See *Résumés*, page 447.

72.—MARY OUR HOPE.

I am the Mother of holy hope.—ECCLES. xxiv. 24.

CONSIDERATION.

OUR confidence in a protector rests on his good will in our regard and on his power, and it is so much the greater as that will and that power are more certain. According to this principle, how great ought to be our confidence in Mary!

Who could ever have so much good will toward us as that holy Virgin, who is the most perfect image of the goodness of God; whose heart burns with the same fire of charity as that of our divine Saviour; who was appointed our Mother by Jesus on the cross, and who has a love and tenderness for us whose extent no human understanding can measure? "That loving Mother," says St. Liguori, "has so great a desire to do good to all men that she is even offended if, by our failures to ask her for favors, we do not furnish her with an opportunity of exercising her liberality."

Who among creatures could have so much power as the Mother of God, the great Queen of Heaven, who is raised above the angels to the highest throne next to that of her divine Son, and whose prayers are always heard in their full extent? The Lord has appointed her to be the channel of His mercies and clemency; by favor and privileges, she can do what He does by nature and right, so that she is, with reason, styled by the wonderful name of "Omnipotent Suppliant."

Mother of God to obtain all, and Mother of men to grant all, Mary is truly the hope of Christians, who can address her in those words of blessed Thomas à Kempis: "Hail, Virgin full of grace, hope of the faithful, loving Mother of the orphan. When trouble, fear, and uneasiness come upon me, and my soul is desolate, I fly to you with full confidence; for if you are for me, who will be against me; if you protect me, who can injure me?"

The saints have all proclaimed Mary the hope of the human race, and have always placed their confidence in her. "We hear them say: "The treasures of all grace have been entrusted to Mary." * "It is by the hands of his merciful Mother that Jesus Christ communicates His gifts to us." † "Mary is that privileged ark, to which whoever flees for refuge escapes everlasting shipwreck." ‡ "She is like the ladder of Heaven; by it God has descended to earth, and by it men can ascend to heaven." §

"O Virgin most pure, we have no hope but in you." ‖ "Yes, O Blessed Virgin, you are our hope and our treasure, for you hold in your hand the treasures of the divine mercy." ¶

"A sinner, I dare not raise my eyes toward Him whom I have offended, therefore I have recourse to you who are my consolation and my refuge, to you who, being the Mother of the merciful Saviour and my Mother, have the will and the power to help me. You are, after your divine Son, the only hope of your servants, the resource of those who have no other resource, the ransom of captives, our support and our joy." ** "In you is reposed the hope of my salvation, for you wish to restore me to favor with your divine Son, and your protection is the pledge of eternal happiness." ††

"O Mother of holy hope, charitable mediatrix, to whose prayers nothing is refused, my confidence in you is so great that, were my salvation in my own hands, I should prefer to place it in yours. He whom you protect cannot be lost. Therefore, though I were forgotten and abandoned by the whole world, why should I grieve, provided you did not forget and abandon me." * "My children," said St. Bernard, "behold my confidence; I see Mary in the brightness of Heaven, encompassed by the love of her divine Son; I see her amidst the ardors of a burning charity plead for us to the Sacred Heart of Jesus."

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* St. Ildefonsus.
† St. Bernardine.
‡ St. Liguori.
§ St. Fulgentius.
‖ St. Epiphanius.
¶ St. Peter Damian.
** St. Ephrem.
†† St. John Damascene.

How admirable are the sentiments of hope in Mary with which St. Francis of Sales was penetrated, who, after having stated the object of his petition, added: "Do not tell me, O gracious Virgin, that you cannot grant my request; for your beloved Son has given you all power in heaven and on earth; do not tell me that you ought not, for you are the common Mother of all the poor children of Adam, and particularly of me. I am then certain that you will lend me your help and assistance."

Yes, the saints had confidence in Mary, and innumerable facts testify that nothing was better founded than their hope in her. How many miracles in the order of nature, and still more in the order of grace, have been wrought by the protection of that merciful Virgin, who, according to St. Bernard, has never been invoked in vain!

The hope that Christians have in Mary has chiefly for its object the treasures of heaven; but it extends also to the temporal blessings of earth. There is nothing profitable or needful for us that we cannot hope for from the efficacy of the protection of our good Mother.

Mary, who is our hope in all things, has ever been, and is still, the hope of all the true servants of God. In her, the patriarchs and prophets hoped; or, rather, all the just of the old law, who, beholding her in the future, saw her crushing the serpent's head; in her all the saints and

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* St. Liguori.

disciples of Jesus Christ hoped; in her, families, cities and Christian nations have confided; in her, religious orders especially have hoped; all making it their glory to be devoted to her, and testifying, in a thousand ways, their confidence in her assistance.

It is because hope in Mary is an inexhaustible source of the most precious favors! It is because it is in itself an inestimable treasure! With what consolation does it not fill our souls! What is sweeter to our poor hearts than to find some one in whom they can put unlimited confidence! What a source of calm to our souls to think that we have in heaven a Mother who loves us and who is all-powerful! What can be more calculated to prevent despondency, to banish uneasiness, to impel us to enter resolutely and firmly in the path of virtue, until, through the protection of the Holy Virgin in whom we hope, we arrive at last at eternal life?

APPLICATION.

Let our confidence in our good Mother be a firm, unalterable confidence, full of perseverance and filial love; and let nothing be able to weaken this sentiment in us.

Let us hope in Mary, whatever be the state of our souls: if we only, on our part, do what we can, she will most assuredly come to our assistance. Let us hope in Mary, especially when, all human support failing us, our condition seems desperate, for it is then that we shall certainly experience the assistance of her whom St. Ephrem calls, "the hope of those who have no other hope." Let us say, from the bottom of our hearts: "I have hoped in you, O sweet, O powerful Mother of God, and I shall not be confounded."

Let us renew our confidence in Mary in every difficulty we experience. Let us hope in her during life, and especially at the hour of our death, for happy is he who, when about to quit the world, raises his eyes toward Heaven, whence her help can come, and, addressing the Mother of our Redeemer, says to her, in the confiding whispers of a loving heart: I know, O good Mother, that you do not abandon those who put their confidence in you: therefore, I commit my soul into your hands, so that you may present it yourself to Jesus!

PRAYER.

"O Mother of God, whose influence with your Son is unbounded, and who only wish my happiness; O Blessed Virgin, who in your character of Queen of heaven and earth, and mother of the human race, dispense grace with so much liberality and love, I recommend myself to you, I who am so entirely destitute of merit, so poor in virtue, and altogether unable to satisfy the demands of divine justice. You hold the key of the treasures of God which are infinite; draw thence, I beseech you, and give me a share in those riches with a liberality corresponding to my wants."*

O Mary, I hope in you for the present, for the future, and especially for the hour of my death. I have confidence, O my good Mother, that then you will come to receive my soul, to present it to your divine Son, and that you will obtain for me the happy privilege of being admitted by Him to eternal glory.

See *Résumés*, page 447.

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* St. Liguori.

73.—MARY THE SECOND EVE.

The mother of all the living.—GEN. iii. 20.

CONSIDERATION.

IT is with reason that Mary is called the second Eve, for how many features of resemblance exist between her and our first mother who, moreover, prefigured that ever-blessed Virgin.

Eve, when she came forth from the hands of her Creator, was pure and innocent. Mary was conceived without sin, and from the first instant of her existence was worthy of the love of the Most Holy Trinity. Eve was, after Adam, the most excellent of all living creatures; Mary is the highest and most perfect of all creatures.

Eve is the mother of all men in the order of nature, and in that sense she realizes the signification of her name, which is "Mother of all the living;" Mary is the Mother of all men, in the order of grace, and fulfils, in the most admirable manner, the signification of the name of Eve.

Yes, O holy Virgin, you are a mother, for it is by you that we have received Him who alone is our true life, and who wished to associate you with Himself in the work of our regeneration which He came to accomplish.

"Our fall," says St. John Chrysostom, "was brought about by the intervention of a woman and a tree, that of the knowledge of good and evil. In our redemption, there was also the intervention of a woman, the Virgin Mary, and a tree, that of the cross. Thus, the Lord triumphs by the very means that the devil used to vanquish us: He makes use of his own weapons to fight against him." "God," adds St. Liguori, "could make the world out of nothing;

but the world, having been lost by sin, God did not wish to repair His work but by the co-operation of Mary."

Therefore, the Blessed Virgin is called the "coadjutrix of our redemption." * She has, as Suarez teaches, co-operated in our salvation by her sanctity, which made her worthy to be the Mother of God, by the unceasing prayers which she offered up to God while upon earth, and by the sacrifice of the life of her divine Son, whom she consented to see offered up for our redemption.

Let us behold, then, in Mary the second Eve; but let us consider, with all the Fathers, how different she is from the first, and what part she takes in the reparation of her fault.

Among all the works of the Eternal Creator, after that of the Word united to our nature, Mary was His special work; having been created for this end, that by her that which had lost its first perfection, through the sin of Eve, might be restored.

In the same manner, says St. Irenæus, as Eve was to herself, and to the whole human race, a cause of death, so the Virgin Mary was to herself, and the whole human race, a cause of salvation.

"The lying words that brought death glided into the heart of Eve," says Tertullian, "and the true words that brought life penetrated into the heart of Mary, so that what had been lost by a woman was saved by a woman."

St. Augustine, speaking on this subject, says: "The curse pronounced against Eve was changed into a blessing by Mary. The Mother of the human race brought chastisements upon the world; the Mother of God brought it salvation. Eve caused our death; Mary procured life for us; the first wounded us, the second healed us."

St. Bernard expresses the same thought in these words: "Eve was cruel to us, for she was the cause of the old serpent's insinuating his venom into the heart of her husband;

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* Albertus Magnus.

but, on the other hand, we have everything to hope from Mary, who procured for us the all-powerful antidote. The first was an instrument of seduction; the second, of propitiation; the one caused our ruin, the other procured our ransom."

"O admirable Virgin," exclaims the same Saint, "you are worthy of all honor. Yes, you are worthy of being venerated and admired above every pure creature, O woman truly blest, repairer of the sin of our first parents, and who, through your divine Son, are the cause of the life and resurrection of their posterity."

"The Most Holy Virgin," says St. Francis of Sales, "came into the world to regain by her humility what our Mother Eve had lost by her pride and vanity."

Such is the teaching of the Doctors of the Church on this subject, which is admirably summed up by Bossuet: "The work of our fall begins by Eve, of our redemption by Mary; the words of death are brought to Eve, the words of life to Mary; Eve was yet a virgin, Mary was always a virgin; a curse was given to Eve, a blessing to Mary; an angel of darkness accosts Eve, an angel of light speaks to Mary. The angel of darkness pretends to raise Eve to a false greatness, by making her aspire to divinity: 'You shall be,' said he, 'as gods;' * the angel of light establishes Mary in true greatness by an intimate union with God, for He said to her: 'The Lord is with you.' †

"The angel of darkness, speaking to Eve, inspires her with the design of rebellion; the angel of light, speaking to Mary, persuades her to obedience. Eve believed the serpent, and Mary the Angel, so that, as Tertullian says, 'a pious faith effaces the guilt of a rash credulity.'

"Finally, to complete the mystery, Eve, when seduced by the devil, is obliged to fly from the face of God, and Mary, instructed by the Angel, is made worthy of the title

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* Gen. iii. 5.

† St. Luke i. 28.

of 'Mother of God;' Eve having presented us the fruit of death, Mary presents us the fruit of life.

"It cannot be doubted," concludes the learned Bishop of Meaux, "that Mary is the blessed Eve of the new covenant, that she had the same share in our salvation that the first woman had in our ruin, and that the one, being the mother of all subjected to death, the other is the Mother of all who are called to eternal life."

APPLICATION.

Let us bless the divine mercy which, in giving us Jesus, through Mary, has repaired the guilt of Eve, and, in such a manner, that the Church, addressing the great Mother of God, says to her: "O most glorious of virgins, you restore to us, through your adorable child, the privileges of which Eve had unfortunately deprived us;" and, when speaking of the sin of our first parents, she cries out: "O happy fault, which deserved to have such a Redeemer."

Let us honor Mary under the title of Mother of life, or Mother of divine grace. Let us rejoice on account of that life of grace which we receive through her mediation, for grace is the seed of glory — the source of eternal glory.

Let us love the second Eve with a holy filial love, for she is our good Mother to whom we are indebted for so many blessings, and who is filled with so much love for us; let us prove the sincerity of our love by a faithful performance of all she requires of us; by observing, with piety and fervor, the regular practices established in her honor; by committing to her maternal bosom our joys and sufferings, our hopes and perplexities; by living, in a word, like true children of Mary, conformably to that exhortation of St. Francis of Sales: "Let us honor, revere and respect the glorious Virgin Mary; let us love her with a most special love; let us have recourse to her as her children, and cast ourselves into her arms with perfect confidence. At all times, and in all circumstances, let us call upon that sweet Mother, let us invoke her maternal love, and try to imitate her virtues."

Let us place our hopes in her, remembering that the heart of the most loving of mothers cannot be closed to the entreaties of her children; that the second Eve has, by her intercession, all power over the new Adam; that she always delights in drawing from the heavenly treasures to enrich us with the graces of which she is the dispensatrix, and by which, if we correspond to them, we shall escape the snares of the infernal serpent, and be admitted into the garden of eternal delights.

PRAYER.

"Hail, O Queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope! To thee do we cry, poor, banished sons of Eve; to thee do we send up our sighs, weeping and mourning in this valley of tears. Turn, then, O gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us, and after this our exile is ended, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus, O clement, O pious, O sweet Virgin Mary." *

See *Résumés*, page 448.

74.—MARY THE HEALTH OF THE WEAK.

A friend is known in adversity.—ECCLES. xii. 9.

CONSIDERATION.

CHILDREN of Adam, guilty of his sin, to which, alas! we add so many of our own, we live but a short time upon earth, and that short time is filled with miseries, trials, grief, and anxiety; sorrow and death are our sad inheritance since sin came to destroy the original order. We suffer from our first entrance into life; we suffer during life; we suffer still more at the end of life. But God, who has not abandoned man after his sin, has not left him without resource in the sufferings which are the consequences of sin; and if His justice has condemned him to suffering and death, His mercy has procured him, in the divine Saviour, and next to Him, in His most holy Mother, an efficacious remedy against sorrow, and even against the horrors of death.

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* Salve Regina.

Mary is, indeed, next to Jesus, our most powerful help in our sickness and infirmities, and especially in our last agony. Does not the Holy Ghost say: "A friend is known in adversity"? It is, then, in our sufferings and trials that Mary testifies, in a special manner, the love she has for us.

The most perfect image of Him of whom it is written, "He hath borne our infirmities," * she places her happiness in helping us, and can say, with more reason than the Apostle: "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is scandalized, and I am not on fire?" †

Appointed by Jesus Christ, on Calvary, the Mother of all Christians, she has been charged with the mission of succoring them in all their suffering, and that mission it is as pleasing to her to exercise as it is in accord with her sentiments of goodness, charity, and tenderness in our regard?

O all you who suffer, revive your courage and confidence; the Queen of Heaven shares in your sufferings, and will come to your help, if you only ask her to do so. How great are the attentions, the care, and devotedness of a mother for a beloved child whom she sees sick or infirm! Now, Mary is our Mother, and the most loving of mothers, and she considers us as the members of Jesus Christ, and, consequently, is she not inclined to help us as if she were helping Jesus Christ Himself?

It is, then, with great reason that the Church invokes Mary under the title of "Health of the weak," and that

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[*] Isaias liii. 4.

[†] 2 Cor. xi. 29.

the Fathers celebrate her protection, saying, with St. Antoninus: "What more secure refuge than the compassionate Heart of the Mother of the faithful? It is there that the sick find health, the afflicted consolation, the weary relief, and those who are in perplexity salutary counsel."

How many cures have been the reward of prayers offered up to her! Does not almost every sanctuary consecrated to her name remind us of them? In how many of them are not the very walls lost behind inscriptions, symbolical figures, pictures hung as *ex voto* offerings, and other homages of gratitude to that charitable Mother!

The whole earth is filled with monuments of her compassion, and from every side a thousand voices arise to praise the merciful assistance she affords us, who, if she does not entirely relieve us of our misfortunes, makes us support them with faith, courage, and resignation, with a view to God and in a manner meritorious for Heaven.

But the assistance of Mary assumes a more particular character of tenderness and solicitude at the approach of our last hour, at those moments when physical and moral sufferings seem to fall upon us and crush us with all their weight, and when the devil, profiting by our state of weakness, and knowing that there is only a little time left him to accomplish our ruin, makes the most cruel assaults upon us. It is then that Mary keeps nearer to us; it is in proportion as the pain increases, and the danger becomes more imminent, that she redoubles her kindness to those who have served her during their lives, and even those who, having unfortunately neglected to fulfil that duty, return to her and invoke her with fervor at the moment of appearing before God.

That good Mother helps the dying to support with patience and resignation the languor of exhaustion, or the sufferings of a cruel agony; she sheds into their souls a heavenly calm, banishes from them the spirits of evil, comforts them interiorly, makes them draw from their very sufferings fruits of grace which complete their sanctification, and add a new title to the happiness that awaits them.

APPLICATION.

Let us have recourse, with confidence and fervor, to the Most Holy Virgin in our sicknesses and infirmities, begging of her to be delivered from them, if such is the will of God; but, above all, beseeching her to make them profitable to our spiritual advancement.

Let us pray to her for the sick and those in their agony, and if we are near any such, let us urge them to pray to her with confidence.

Let us pray to her for ourselves, and recommend to her, earnestly, our last hour, that moment which must decide our fate forever.

In order to secure her assistance, let us devote ourselves firmly and constantly to her service while we are in health; and it is thus that we may count upon her when our physical strength fails us, and life is about to leave us, for then she will encompass us with her protection, and our death will neither be terrible nor appalling, but peaceable and calm, like the pleasing passage from the close of a combat to the joys of a triumph.

PRAYER.

O Holy Virgin, who art the assured shelter of all who invoke thee, penetrated with the most lively confidence in thy goodness, I come to prostrate myself at thy feet, and to recommend to thee the last moments of my life.

When my feet, unable to move, shall remind me that my earthly course is drawing to an end: Mary, health of the weak, pray for me.

When my hands, trembling and benumbed, shall no longer be able to clasp the crucifix to my breast, but shall let it fall, through very feebleness, on my bed of death: Mary, health of the weak, pray for me.

When my eyes, grown dim and troubled at the approach of death, shall fix their last and dying looks upon thee: Mary, health of the weak, pray for me.

When my lips, cold and trembling, shall, for the last time, pronounce your holy name, and that of your adorable Son: Mary, health of the weak, pray for me.

When my countenance, pale and ghastly, shall fill others with compassion and grief, and my hair, bathed in the sweat of death, shall announce that my dissolution is at hand: Mary, health of the weak, pray for me.

When my ears, about to close forever to all human discourse, shall hear no other voice than that of the Sovereign Judge, pronouncing the sentence that will fix my eternal destiny: Mary, health of the weak, pray for me.

When my heart, weakened and overwhelmed with the pains of sickness, shall be seized with the last agonies of death, and worn out and exhausted with its struggles against the enemy of my salvation: Mary, health of the weak, pray for me.

When the last tears shall trickle down my cheeks, deign to offer them to God in expiation for my sins, so that I may die as a victim of penance, and, at that terrible moment: Mary, health of the weak, pray for me.

When my Brothers of the Institute, relatives and friends, assembled round my bed, shall be moved to pity at my sad condition, and invoke your assistance in my behalf: Mary, health of the weak, pray for me.

When the use of my senses shall have failed me, and the whole world shall have disappeared from my view; when I shall groan in the throes of death and the tortures of the last agony: Mary, health of the weak, pray for me.

When the last heavy sighs of my heart shall press my soul to leave my body, offer them to Jesus as coming from a holy impatience to go to Him, and, Mary, health of the weak, pray for me.

When my soul shall depart from this world and leave my body pale, cold, and lifeless, deign thou to offer my death to Jesus, as an homage I present to His Supreme Majesty, and, O Mary, health of the weak, pray for me.

When, at last, my soul shall appear before its Judge, and shall behold for the first time the brightness of His Infinite Majesty, grant that He may receive me into the bosom of His mercy, so that I may sing His praises through all eternity. Amen.

See *Résumés*, page 448.

75.—MARY THE PATRONESS OF A GOOD DEATH.

Thou wilt bring my soul out of trouble. — Ps. cxlii. 11.

CONSIDERATION.

AT the thought of death trouble and fear seize us. The saints themselves could not look forward without fear to that moment that decides our eternity, and many of them might have justly said, with St. Liguori: "When I think of that terrible moment when I have to render an account to God for my conduct, and when I remember that, by my sins, I have myself so many times written the sentence of my own condemnation, fear penetrates my heart and dries up the very marrow of my bones. . . . O my God! what will become of me and what shall be my eternal destiny!"

Oh, what need have men at that hour of a most especial assistance from heaven! That assistance we find in our divine Saviour, who is our viaticum on the journey to eternity, and next to Him is His Most Holy Mother, who is truly the patroness of a good death.

"Since the day," says the same saint, "when Mary had the consolation and sorrow of being present at the dying agonies of her Son, the Leader of the predestined, she obtained in like manner, or rather, she received the mission of assisting all the predestined in that fearful passage."

With what readiness does she not exercise that office of unspeakable charity so agreeable to her heart!

She sees, in Christians worthy of that name, Jesus Christ, whose members they are, and she cannot abandon them no more than she could have consented to leave Calvary when her divine Son was dying on the cross. Knowing how great is the desire of the heart of Jesus that men, by applying to themselves the merits of His passion, should make a truly holy death, she does all she can that this desire may receive its full accomplishment.

Mother and protectress of the faithful, could she abandon us when we have most need of her assistance? Is it not at the bedside of a sick or dying child that a mother's tenderness is most shown? Is it not at the moment of his client's greatest distress that a faithful protector hastens to his assistance?

Thus everything reminds us that this divine Mother does not abandon us when all abandon us, and that she covers, with the shadow of her protection, the souls of her servants in the struggles of death.

Mary assists Christians when dying by putting the devil to flight, or by rendering his attacks powerless to injure them. Whatever may be the temptations with which he assails them, she opposes them, and makes them turn to his confusion. Sometimes she does not immediately banish the evil spirit, that her servants may have the merits of new combats, but when she judges it expedient she casts upon him a look before which he flees away terrified, as if the eyes of the Holy Virgin darted lightning that hurled him back to hell.

Often she does not permit him to torment them, as has happened to a great many saints, who, though frequently and violently tempted during life, found themselves in the greatest tranquillity at the approach of death. "No, no," says St. Liguori; "Mary does not abandon us in suffering, and, least of all, in the agonies of dissolution, which of all sufferings are the most terrible. After having been all our life in exile, she becomes our sweetness at the hour when it closes, by procuring us a calm and happy death." How many of her servants might have exclaimed, like Father Suarez, who was devoted to her: "I did not think it was so sweet to die!"

Mary assists the faithful in their last moments in the way that may prove most profitable to their souls; some she preserves in the full enjoyment of their faculties, so that they may still more increase their merits by a holy use of their sufferings; for others she procures lucid moments, so that they may be reconciled with God and purified from their sins; for many she obtains the great grace of receiving extreme unction and the holy viaticum with the requisite dispositions; in the case of some she makes their agony less protracted and painful, so that her protection is useful to all in sustaining their courage, exciting their faith, reviving their confidence in God, preserving charity in their hearts, inducing them to unite themselves to Jesus Christ suffering and dying, and thus to make them complete the work of their sanctification.

"Not only does Mary assist at their last hour those who have been devoted to her in life, but she comes," says St. Jerome, "to meet their souls, and presents them herself at the tribunal of God." "Oh! what a happiness it is for them!" exclaims Richard of St. Laurence, "for the devils dare not accuse before the Sovereign Judge a soul protected by His divine Mother."

Addressing himself to the servants of Mary, Pere Le Jeune makes use of these admirable and consoling words: "That loving Mother whom you have so much honored during life, will come to meet your soul, and, with inexpressible sweetness, will say to you: 'You have so often saluted me as your Queen and your Mother, that I wish, in my turn, to acknowledge you as my subject and my son.'

"You called me 'Star of the Sea,' I wish to be such to you by leading you into the harbor of salvation. You have said to me, 'the Lord is with thee.' He will be also with you, for, from this moment, you will nevermore leave me. Behold the hour in reference to which you have so many times begged my prayers. I have, indeed, prayed for you, and my Son, out of regard to my prayers, now opens to you the gates of a happy eternity."

"Happy, then, are those who have lived under the gentle servitude of that Queen of goodness! How much reason they have to bless the precious chains of their devotion which procures them the happiness of dying in that calm which is the forerunner of eternal repose." *

With what transports of joy will they congratulate themselves on having been the servants of the Queen of Heaven, and with what sentiments of gratitude will they bless her for having saved them from every danger, for having pleaded their cause at the tribunal of her divine Son, and having made them the object of the divine mercy for all eternity.

APPLICATION.

Let us neglect nothing that is in our power to obtain the grace of a holy death; let us remember that a most important interest is at stake, indeed, the only really important and decisive interest which can concern us.

Let us therefore secure, by every means we can, the pro-

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* St. Liguori.

tection of Mary for the hour of our last struggle. Let us avoid all that displeases that Holy Virgin, and, consequently, every sin and every occasion of sin; let us consecrate ourselves to her, and prove ourselves her true servants by making it our study to love, honor, bless, invoke, and imitate her.

Let us recite, with attention and piety, the prayers we address to her, and, particularly, the Angelical Salutation in which we ask her assistance for the hour of our death. Let us, frequently, pray to her in words like these in which St. Liguori addressed her: "O divine Mother of my Saviour, who art also my Mother, intercede for me with Him, so that He may be favorable to me at the day of judgment. . . . Mother of Sorrow, I beseech you, by the anguish of heart you experienced on seeing Jesus expire upon the cross, to obtain for me the grace of a happy death. . . . Advocate of sinners, do not abandon my poor soul in its passage from time to eternity. Come to meet it, receive it into your arms, and be thus its escort to the mansions of God."

Let us pray to her for those in their agony, so that she may defend them against the rage of hell, and obtain for those among them who, alas! are in the state of sin, the grace of reconciliation. If we are near any one dying, let us inspire him to have recourse to that loving Mother, and on our part let us be earnest in praying to her for him, with piety and confidence.

Let us always pray to her in our temptations and dangers, and in all critical circumstances in which we may be placed, so that we may thus invoke her, as it were, through the force of habit, at the hour of death, and that her blessed name coming of its own accord, if we may say so, to rest upon our lips, may be a passport to the City of God.

PRAYER.

O holy Virgin, whose heart is filled with goodness, love, and compassion toward us, deign to grant me your assistance during the whole course of my life, but, above all, at the terrible moment when the agonies of death shall come upon me. For the glory of the name of Jesus, and your own, hear in its full extent this prayer which I so frequently offer up to you: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death." Amen.

See *Résumés*, page 449.

76.—MARY THE GATE OF HEAVEN.

This is the gate of heaven.—GEN. xxviii. 17.

CONSIDERATION.

UNDER how many aspects is not that title of "Gate of Heaven," which the Church gives to her, and which is so glorious, applicable to the Blessed Virgin, and, at the same time, how eminently calculated it is to revive our confidence in her protection.

Mary is the "Gate of Heaven," because it is by Mary that the King of Heaven has come to us. On the day of His great mercy, when the times foretold had been fulfilled, the Lord regarded the humility, obedience, and poverty of His handmaid, and did great things in her. He assumed our nature in her virginal womb, and thus, through her, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us," * so as to be our reconciliation and salvation. "God," says St. Peter Damian, "descended from Heaven to earth by Mary, so that by Mary, men might deserve to rise to Heaven."

* St. John i. 14.

Mary is the "Gate of Heaven," because it is by Mary that the graces which Heaven gives to earth are communicated to us. "The universal advocate of all men," says St. Thomas, "it is by her means that all those who obtain their salvation are saved;" "and," says St. Augustine, "as she contributed by her charity to the spiritual birth of the faithful, so God wishes that she should also contribute, by her intercession, to make them obtain the life of grace in this world and the life of glory in eternity."

"O Mary," exclaims St. Ildefonsus, "O glorious Lady, the Lord has intrusted to you all the riches that He wishes to dispense to His creatures; all the riches of grace are intrusted to your keeping." "As letters of privilege or favor that a monarch signs," says St. Liguori, "must, necessarily, pass through the gate of his palace, so no grace descends to us from Heaven that does not pass through the hands of Mary."

The prophet Isaias had foretold that a throne of divine mercy should be prepared for men.* "And what," asks St. Bonaventure, "is that throne of mercy? It is Mary," he answers, "for it is by her that all men, just or sinners, have access to the Most High.

Mother of God and our Mother, she is our mediatrix with that Sovereign King, not only by transmitting to us the grace He grants us, but also, by offering Him our homage of adoration, love, thanksgiving, reparation, and prayer; a homage which she unites to that which Jesus Christ offers to His Father, and to that which she herself offers along with Him.

Oh what a source of consolation and what a motive for hope! The immaculate Virgin, whom the Lord loves with the greatest love, truly wishes to make our prayers her own, and to permit, or rather urge us to make all that we offer to God pass through her hands and her heart. Our offering thus presented at His Heavenly throne is acceptable to Him, and He overwhelms us with proofs of His bounty!

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* Isaias xvi. 5.

Happy are the Christians who, understanding the advantages of this life of union, offer her their works that she may present them united with her own to that divine King to whom she is pleasing above all others! How prudent and wise they are, for what value do they not thus give to their actions, and what graces are not the reward of their piety!

Mary is the "Gate of Heaven," because it is by Mary that the Saints have entered into Heaven, and that we hope to enter there. "Thus," as St. Jerome, St. Vincent Ferrier, and St. Liguori, say, "she is not content with helping her servants at the approach and in the moment of death; she goes to meet their souls, receives them with mercy, and presents them to her divine Son, from whom she obtains a favorable sentence upon them."

St. Bonaventure says, likewise, that she is called the "Gate of Heaven," because no one can enter into that abode of happiness who does not enter through her, and St. Athanasius addresses her in these words: "You have been filled with grace, O Queen of light, so as to become the path of salvation by which we can ascend to Heaven."

"O Mary," exclaims St. Bernard, "it is by you that we have access to God the Saviour. . . . Our Queen and our mediatrix, recommend and offer us to your Son: we entreat you to do so by the grace with which you have been honored, by the mercy you have exhibited to the world. Grant in the end that He who through you clothed Himself with our weakness, may make us partakers of His happiness and glory."

Penetrated with these truths, St. Charles Borromeo caused a picture of the Blessed Virgin to be placed at the porch of all the churches within his jurisdiction, so that his people might understand that they could not enter into the temple of eternal glory without the protection of the Blessed Virgin called "the Gate of Heaven."

It is by Mary that so many souls devoted to her have entered there, who by her help have walked with fidelity and constancy in the path of justice. They have loved, honored, blessed, and imitated her during their pilgrimage, and they have seen that tender Mother, whose heart is an abyss of charity and goodness, come to them at the moment of leaving the world, and introduce them into the City of God.

Mary has been the Gate of Heaven to a multitude of souls who have strayed from the path of virtue, and many of whom have fallen into the abyss of evil. She has obtained for them special graces to which they have corresponded, and has thus brought them to be reconciled with her divine Son.

Mary is the Gate of Heaven to the souls in purgatory, for she obtains, either through herself or the prayers of her servants, that the time of their expiation be abridged, or that they may be immediately admitted into Heaven.

Mary, if we sincerely wish it, will be for us also the "Gate of Heaven." By the protection she will give us, and the graces she will obtain for us, we shall easily be able to arrive at that heavenly Jerusalem which is the object of all our wishes, toward which our hearts, unable to be satisfied here below, continually ascend, and where we shall contemplate, in her beauty, the Virgin Mother of God, seated at the right hand of her Son.

APPLICATION.

With the Church and the saints, let us honor Mary under the title of "Gate of Heaven." Let us beg her to complete all its signification with regard to us personally, our relations, brothers, benefactors, and friends, as well as the suffering souls in purgatory.

Let us rejoice and bless the Lord for the salutary mission which He has confided to Mary. Oh! what happiness and what a motive to reanimate our confidence. It is Mary, it is the sweet Virgin, it is our good Mother, who is placed between Heaven and us to transmit to us the treasures of that eternal abode, and bring us, one day, to the enjoyment of its glories.

Let us say, then, in our sadness and despondency: Courage, my soul, courage! Let us be truly devoted to Mary, and through Mary we shall fulfil our destiny; we shall be watered with the dew of divine grace; we shall produce fruits of sanctification, and we shall behold the gates of the Eternal City open to receive us at the moment of our departure from this world.

Let us labor to secure the protection of the most holy Virgin, through whom we may go to Heaven. For that purpose, let us show ourselves her true disciples, loving, honoring, invoking her, obeying her as the saints did, studying to imitate her most holy life, desiring to reproduce, in all the perfection possible to us, the virtues by which she merited her incomparable dignity, and by which we shall also deserve to enjoy the immense happiness which is her portion and inheritance.

PRAYER.

Hail, O Queen of saints! Hail, O happy Virgin, whom the Church calls the "Gate of Heaven" always open! Hail, O sweet and charitable Mediatrix, through whom so many of the elect, who do you homage for their crown of glory, have gone to Heaven! O tender Mother, grant, I beseech you, that I may be, one day, among that number. Obtain for me, from your divine Son, that I may live and persevere in virtue, and die in such holy dispositions that you may be able to say to me these consoling words, bringing unutterable joy: "My child, this day thou shalt be with me in paradise." Amen.

See *Résumés*, page 449.

77.—CHARACTER OF DEVOTION TO MARY.

Where is my honor? — MALACH. i. 6.

CONSIDERATION.

MARY," says St. Bernard, "is the treasurer of the graces which Jesus Christ has merited for us. But in favor of whom will she dispense them? On whom will she pour them forth abundantly? Doubtless, on those who honor her with a truly religious worship, who tenderly love her, who imitate her virtues, and serve her with zeal and fervor." He thus teaches us that devotion to Mary, to produce its salutary fruits, ought to possess certain qualities that make up its character.

The other doctors speak in the same way. Thus St. Francis of Sales, in his exhortations to this devotion, says: "Let us honor, revere, respect, and love, with a special love, the most holy and glorious Virgin Mary. Let us have recourse to her, and, like little children, cast ourselves into her arms with perfect confidence. Let us implore her protection, invoke her maternal love, and try to imitate her virtues, thus testifying that we have toward her a truly filial heart."

"My brethren," says the blessed Thomas à Kempis, "if you wish to be consoled in your sorrows, have recourse to Mary, pay her homage, invoke her, recommend yourselves to her. Rejoice with Mary, weep with Mary, pray with Mary, walk with Mary, seek Jesus with Mary; finally, desire to live and die with Jesus and Mary."

"O Mother of my Saviour!" exclaims St. Ildefonsus, "you who are blessed among all women, pure among all virgins, and Queen of all creatures, grant that I may love you as much as I am capable of loving; that I may publish your greatness to the full extent of my power; that I may contribute to your honor with all the zeal that grace and the strength of my nature enable me to bring to that work."

From these words, and all the others made use of by the saints in reference to this subject, it is easy to conclude that, to produce all its salutary effects, devotion to Mary ought to be at once a devotion of honor, love, supplication, gratitude, and imitation; that it ought to proceed from devotion to Jesus Christ, and end there; be perfectly united with the duties of our state; be based on our convictions; be preserved, and even augmented, in difficulties, and, above all, that it ought to manifest itself by an ardent zeal for the honor of that Holy Virgin.

The true servant of Mary honors her, respects her, admires and proclaims her greatness, her prerogatives, her virtues, and her glory. He venerates her name, her pictures, her sanctuaries; he testifies, in a thousand ways, his dependence upon her, and makes it his happiness to remain at her feet and acknowledge himself her servant. He loves her with a love which unites that of a most faithful subject to a most deserving Sovereign; with the love of a most affectionate child for the most tender and amiable of mothers. He frequently invokes her, offering prayers to her at stated times, and having recourse, moreover, in all circumstances, to her protection. He recommends to her, with earnestness, both his spiritual and temporal interests, but chiefly his sanctification and salvation.

In his dispositions, he says to her, with St. Anselm: "Mary, it is you whom my heart wishes to love, respect, and venerate; it is you whom I aspire to praise worthily, and invoke with fervor." "O my soul," adds he, with the same holy Doctor, "make it your pleasing study to love the Holy Virgin, who is the ornament and the joy of Heaven; to proclaim the greatness, and entreat the clemency, of the Mother of God, who is also the Mother and protectress of men. . . . Yes, O Holy Virgin, may my soul know you, revere you, love you, and implore you, above all, after your divine Son, my Lord and my God!"

The true servant of Mary feels toward her the most lively gratitude, and thanks her for all the heavenly favors she has obtained for him, as well as for all for which those who are dear to him are indebted to her. In this respect he shares the sentiments of St. Anselm, who exclaimed: "O woman, blessed among all, who hast given birth to Him who is the life of my soul and my Redeemer, how can I thank you as your kindness to me deserves? What thanksgiving can be worthy of the Mother of my God, whose fruitful virginity has broken the bonds of my captivity, and delivered me from eternal death?"

The true servant of Mary makes it his principal study to do what she requires of him, and to practice the virtues of which she gave an example to the world. He knows that it is, above all, by the imitation of that Holy Mother, that our respect, love, and piety toward her are shown. Therefore he carefully studies her conduct, and, as far as he can, discovers the dispositions of her immaculate heart, so as to walk in her footsteps, to run after the odor of the sweet perfumes that she exhales, and thus to follow with her, and through her, the path that leads to happiness.

The true servant of Mary studies to be the true servant of Jesus. He goes to Mary that he may go more surely to Jesus. He sees in her the root of Jesse, to which he must draw near to come to the flower that she bears.

He makes those words of St. Bonaventure the rule of his piety: "Whoever you may be, seek the flower on the stem; by the stem you will come to the flower, and by the flower to the spirit of divinity, in which it has embalmed the earth."

Mary, as she herself revealed to St. Bridget, is the lover of hearts, attracting them to herself, as the magnet does steel, but only to unite them to Jesus Christ. Those, therefore, who are truly desirous to please her, and obtain her protection, are entirely devoted to her divine Son, and make it their principal occupation to adore Him, love Him, glorify Him, and enter into the spirit of the devotion to the most holy sacrament, to the passion, to the sacred Heart, and to the holy childhood.

The true servant of Mary is free from hypocrisy, and uninfluenced by human respect. His devotion to that divine Mother rests on the truths of revelation and the teaching of the Church; it dwells both in his mind and heart, reigns over his thoughts and sentiments, occupies his whole soul, consecrates every part of his conduct, sustains him in times of lukewarmness, misfortune, and temptation, as well as in seasons of consolations, prosperity, and calm.

The true servant of Mary is courageous and generous. Knowing that love is proved by sacrifice, he is attentive and faithful, with a view to please that beloved Mother; to impose privations on himself; to restrain his inclinations, his likings and humors; to discharge all his duties with ardor, and accept with resignation all the sufferings that Providence sends him. He is equally zealous to make the Queen of virgins known, loved, and served; to raise up souls devoted to her, who fervently embrace and zealously propagate her holy devotion, the source of so many graces, and, to so many, the way of Heaven.

APPLICATION.

Do we recognize, from the portrait thus exhibited, that we are the true servants of Mary? Is our devotion to the Mother of God unlimited, well-regulated, sincere, filial, constant, progressive, courageous, generous, and zealous? Are we faithful in obeying Mary in whatever we know that she wishes of us; in following the examples she has given us; in imitating her virtues, as perfectly as we ought, in our holy state?

As Religious, let us make our devotion to Mary consist chiefly in the observance of our rules, which being, for us, the expression of the will of Jesus Christ, must, necessarily, express the will, also, of His Most Holy Mother. Let us love those exercises of the Community by which we honor the Most Holy Virgin, especially the recital of the rosary.

As Christian teachers, let us carefully seek and use, with wisdom and perseverance, the means of making our pupils the servants of Mary. If we love them; if we really wish their happiness; if our most ardent desire is to see them follow the path of virtue and work out their own sanctification, let us endeavor to imbue their hearts with sentiments of veneration, love, and confidence toward that good Mother in Heaven, whose protection will preserve or rescue us from shipwreck, and bring us to the harbor of safety.

PRAYER.

O Mary, Most Holy Mother of God, and my Mother, how far, alas! am I from being one of your true servants! How weak and defective is my devotion toward you! How much it wants of resembling that of the saints toward you! But I wish, by changing my conduct, to be entirely devoted to you, and to show this, above all, by the imitation of your virtues. I make this resolution, Most Holy Virgin, and present it to you, beseeching you to obtain for me the grace of being faithful to it even to death.

See *Résumés*, page 450.

78. — EXCELLENCE OF DEVOTION TO MARY.

All good things came to me, together with her. — WISDOM vii. 11.

CONSIDERATION.

UNDER whatever aspect devotion to Mary may be considered, we shall find that it is exceedingly beautiful, grand, noble, and profitable, worthy of our highest aspirations, and, above all, the encomiums we can bestow upon it.

Considered in itself, it is veneration and love for one who, after God, is the greatest, noblest, and most amiable of beings; it is the invocation of a most benevolent and powerful patroness; it is gratitude to the most devoted of Mothers, and most generous of benefactors; it is the imitation of the purest, the most heroic and most perfect virtue.

Considered in its origin, it is heavenly and divine. Without speaking of the place it occupied in the thoughts and hearts of the just of the old law, who beheld in the future the co-redemptrix promised to guilty man, do we not find it professed by the angels themselves, who, from the time of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, extolled and honored her as their Sovereign Queen, and later by the Archangel Gabriel, who saluted her as full of grace and blessed among women?

Devotion to Mary has, in truth, its starting-point from the Angel's salutation; it is continued by the exclamation of Elizabeth, who cries out: "Whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?"* finally, by the respect and veneration of St. Joseph for Mary, after an angel had revealed to him her sublime dignity. It was, in some sense, practiced by Jesus Christ Himself, who for thirty years appeared to do nothing else than honor His divine Mother by His love and submission. It was established, as much as that was possible, among the first faithful, who made it their happiness to show their filial veneration to her who had been given to them as a Mother by Jesus when dying on the cross.

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*St. Luke i. 43.

Considered in its development and duration, devotion to Mary is no less admirable. Like Christianity itself, it was small in its beginning, but, like it, it has extended so as now to cover the whole earth. It has met with many obstacles, but nothing could impede its progress; it has conquered the world by the divine strength that inheres in it, and by the zeal of the Church to establish and propagate it, so that, despite the incessant attacks of hell, it has become universal, and seems, in our days, to shine with a more brilliant light than ever before.

How equally excellent is devotion to Mary considered in what constitutes its expression. Who can tell the number of sanctuaries under the name of our Lady, many of which, being masterpieces of architecture, have required whole centuries for their construction! Who can tell the number of statues and images of the Blessed Virgin exposed to the veneration of the faithful! How many feasts in her honor, and with what piety and holy joy they are celebrated! How many hymns and canticles in her praise! How many books composed with a view to praise her and lead hearts to love her! How many individuals, associations, and cities dedicated to her and placed under her patronage!

But it is, above all, by its effects that devotion to Mary shows itself deserving of our admiration. The divine Master has said: "Every tree is known by its fruits." * Let us, then, judge the tree of this devotion by the fruits it has produced, and continues to produce.

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* St. Luke vi. 44.

How great has been the influence of devotion to the Blessed Virgin in destroying paganism and barbarism, and establishing Christianity and civilization! How much has it served to secure the triumph of the Church! St. Cyril, at the Council of Ephesus, thus addresses Mary: "I hail thee, O Mother of God, sceptre of true doctrine, by whom the devils have been put to flight, and who hast triumphed over all heresies."

Devotion to Mary has powerfully contributed to unite hearts, to put an end to enmities and wars, and to bring men to embrace each other with brotherly love, at the foot of the statue of their common Mother. How great has been its efficacy in exciting the zeal of the apostles of the faith, in sustaining the courage of the martyrs, in enkindling Christian heroism under the countless forms it has assumed! Thus, it has been the source of the most inestimable blessings to society and the Church militant! Has it not been so likewise to the Church suffering? For how many souls in purgatory have had their sufferings lightened, or been relieved from them entirely, as a reward for the devotion they had had to the Mother of God, or by the application, in their behalf, of indulgences attached to holy practices in her honor, or by the expiatory merit of good works done with a view to glorify her?

Devotion to Mary is the consolation, glory, and support of religious congregations and Christian families, through the blessings it draws down upon them, and through the influence it exercises on minds and hearts. How much, for instance, has it contributed to maintain regularity, piety, charity and zeal in our Institute! What a resource has this devotion been in all the difficulties it has encountered!

Finally, let us consider it in its principal spiritual effects on the souls that practice it. It is an abundant source of conversion to sinners, and perseverance and perfection to the just. "Scarcely," says St. Liguori, "has it begun to dawn on the soul, when it scatters the darkness of iniquity." It serves us as both sword and buckler against the enemies of our salvation. "If the devil," says St. Bonaventure, "that malignant robber of man's happiness, makes an inroad upon the soul, and the favor and mercy of Mary begin to shine upon it, he immediately takes to flight and abandons his prey." "He," says St. Anthony of Padua, "who has found Mary, that is to say, who embraces the practice of devotion to her, has found all graces, because there is nothing he cannot obtain through that all-powerful mediatrix."

Is it not within our own experience that that devotion supplies every want of our souls, leading us on from virtue to virtue of the most exalted kind, enlightening us in our doubts, preventing despondency, reviving charity, rekindling our fervor, and sustaining our patience and spirit of sacrifice? Therefore, St. Chantal recommended it as a remedy for weak, troubled, and despondent souls, and all the masters of the spiritual life earnestly exhort such to embrace the practice of it.

"Come," cries out St. John Damascene, "and embrace that devotion which is the joy of the unfortunate, by becoming their support in weakness and consolation in adversity." "Hear, ye who desire the kingdom of God," say St. Bonaventure and St. Liguori; "honor Mary, and you shall have life and salvation." "My children," said St. Philip Neri, "if you wish to have the gift of perseverance, honor Mary."

APPLICATION.

Let us practice these recommendations, so eminently calculated to make the most lively impression on our souls. Persuaded of the excellence of devotion to our good Mother, let us bless God for having opened, in the Church, that fountain from which so many blessings flow, and let us show, by our conduct, that we appreciate it, and desire to secure its advantages.

Let us be true servants of Mary and apostles of her devotion. Let us show ourselves her worthy children by loving her with a love tender, constant, devoted, attentive to please her, zealous for her glory, desirous to resemble her, and thus merit her favor.

Let us recite our prayers in her honor, fervently and exactly; let us keep her feasts with piety and love; let us inspire the children trusted to us with devotion to her; let us beg her to obtain for us the grace of embracing its practice and making constant progress therein, until that great means of sanctification has produced all its fruits in our souls; that is to say, until we have attained to sanctity and salvation.

PRAYER.

Happy, O holy Virgin, are the souls that are devoted to you! They swim in the abundance of spiritual blessings, and pursue with safety their journey to the holy Sion. Oh! grant, I beseech you, that I may be of that number; that, from this very moment, I may render you, with all the fervor, fidelity, and constancy I am capable of, the tribute I owe you, and that, by the imitation of your virtues, I may merit to be one day admitted into that land of happiness where you await me, and in which those who have been your faithful servants in this life enjoy your presence with unalterable happiness in the life to come.

See *Résumés*, page 450.

79.—DEVOTION TO MARY A SIGN OF PREDESTINATION.

He that shall find me shall find life, and shall have salvation from the Lord.—Prov. viii. 35.

CONSIDERATION.

A TRUE devotion to Mary is a sign of a glorious predestination, and one of the most certain proofs that we shall one day be admitted to the mansions of peace, because it procures for us every kind of grace, is a powerful resource against our spiritual enemies, excites holy dispositions in our souls, which it every day makes more perfect, and, finally, because it prepares us most effectually for a happy death.

God, who disposes of all things powerfully and mercifully, has made Mary the dispensatrix of His graces. "He wishes," say the Doctors of the Church, "that all spiritual blessings which men stand in need of should be communicated to them by her." "My wounds," says Jesus to us, according to a pious author,* "are fountains of grace, but this grace flows only through the hands of Mary." "Our divine Saviour, who is our life and hope, is the fruit of Mary; but he who wishes to share in the fruit must go to the tree. It is by Mary that we find Jesus; and whoever has found that divine Mother, at the same time finds her Son." †

Thus, to have true devotion to the Blessed Virgin is to go with certainty to the Author of grace, is to become the object of the boundless liberality of God, is to place one's self under the influence of her who is called the mysterious moon by whom the vivifying rays of the Sun of justice are transmitted to us, is to receive in superabundance all the helps for gaining heaven that are given to men.

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* Le Père Contenson. † St. Liguori.

Our salvation encounters numberless obstacles, but there is not one which we cannot overcome by devotion to Mary. Does it not serve, as its very first fruit, to detach our hearts from creatures and raise them to God; to moderate our passions, and subject them to wholesome and necessary restraints; to fortify us against the seductions of this world by attracting us to the glorious splendors of that higher world, to which our Mother, in the order of grace, so pressingly invites us, and where she awaits our coming? Therefore St. Laurence Justinian, in referring to these words of Ecclesiasticus: "Her bands are a healthful binding,"* says that these bands are no other than those with which Mary binds her servants, so that they may not wander into licentiousness.

"O Blessed Virgin," exclaims St. John Damascene, "to have a tender devotion to you is to have armor that God puts into the hands of those only whom He wishes to save." "The devils," says St. Bernard, "those serpents full of malice and venom, are forced to withdraw from the souls around which there is the sweet odor of devotion to Mary."

Yes, the servants of Mary are in safety, for they have taken refuge in that tower of David to which no enemies can ever approach, where are hung a thousand bucklers, the armor of valiant men; they are embarked on that ship beheld by St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi, which Mary herself guided to the harbor of the eternal city.

No doubt the storms of temptation still come to assail them, but they do not overwhelm them, for she who is their pilot has power to command the winds and the waves, and make them obey her. By her assistance they discover all the snares and overcome all the efforts of hell. She gives full meaning, in regard to each one of us, to that prayer of St. Liguori: "O Most Holy Virgin, what have I to fear if you accord me your protection? No, I shall fear nothing; neither my sins, for you can obtain their forgiveness; nor the devil, for you are more powerful than hell; nor your divine Son, so justly irritated against me, for you can appease Him. All I fear is that I may not have recourse to you in my temptations."

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* Eccles. vi. 31.

Devotion to Mary manifests, on the part of those that practice it, dispositions that inspire confidence as to their salvation. Sincerely devoted to the Mother, they cannot but be devoted to the Son and anxious to observe His commandments, which can alone lead to life. Filled with the desire of pleasing the Queen of virgins and becoming the objects of her protection, they cannot but vehemently desire to avoid sin, to fly the occasions of it, to correct their failings, and practice virtue.

Their devotion to the "Mother of holy hope" secures her aid under all the circumstances in which they can be placed, and, above all, in that the most decisive of all, on which their eternal destiny depends. Mary comes to them in their last moments, to defend them from the devil and free them from all his fetters, to establish or strengthen them in charity, and to give them the grace of final perseverance.

Have not thousands of holy deaths been seen of men who had lived in sin, but who had been faithful to some daily practice in honor of Mary? How, then, can we doubt that this great Queen will procure the same grace for those who are truly devoted to her!

Thus everything proclaims that devotion to Mary is a mark of predestination, a sign of salvation; that devotion to her who is called the "Gate of Heaven" really leads to Heaven. The Doctors of the Church express themselves on this point in the most precise words.

"O Most Holy Virgin," says St. Anselm, "it is impossible that he should not be saved who places his confidence in you, after God, and whom you honor with your love." "O Mary," exclaims St. Bonaventure, "he who honors you is far from damnation. I have hoped in you, O my Queen, and I shall not be confounded forever. Happy those who are pleasing to you! the inhabitants of heaven already look upon them as participators in their happiness." "Let us be zealous servants of the Mother of God," says St. Liguori, "and we shall infallibly be of the number of the elect; that devotion will be to us a mark by which God will recognize us as His own."

Finally, the Church herself teaches this truth, by saying to Mary: "All those who abide in you, shall be in happiness, O holy Mother of God," * and by applying to her those words of Wisdom: "They that work by me shall not be confounded, and they that explain me, shall have life everlasting." †

APPLICATION.

Let us embrace, lovingly and zealously, that devotion whose excellence is inexpressible. If we really desire our salvation, let us assure ourselves of it by this means, which is of itself so abundant a source of peace and consolation.

Let us raise our hearts to Mary. Let us make it our whole study and endeavor to love, honor, bless, and invoke her, as the saints have loved, honored, blessed, and invoked her. Let us on all occasions offer up to her merciful throne the most fervent prayers.

We run so many dangers; let us then call to our aid her by whom we can escape them; we dread the sentence that the Sovereign Judge will pass upon us; let us then implore our advocate, who can make mercy rule over justice.

Let us strive to please her, and merit her protection, and,

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* Little Office of the Blessed Virgin.

† Eccles. xxiv. 31.

for this purpose, let us flee from sin; let us avoid all that could displease her pure heart, and labor to imitate the virtues of which she is a perfect model.

Let us neglect nothing to propagate her devotion; to train our pupils to make them contract the habit of having recourse to her intercession; in all their necessities to pray to her every day, to be faithful during their whole lives to some one of the many practices in her honor, for that will be to them a groundwork of hope, a cause of preservation from sin, or, at least, a plank after shipwreck.

Let our thoughts, words, and actions show that we are truly devoted to our good Mother. Oh, how much reason we shall have hereafter to congratulate ourselves on our happiness! Living as servants of Mary, we shall die under the protection of her who, after having assisted us during our exile, will herself introduce us to our true country.

PRAYER.

O Mary, "Help of Christians and Gate of Heaven," may all nations honor and serve you; may all hearts cling to you, and consecrate all their affections to you.

For me, O my most sweet and charitable Mother, I beseech you to obtain the grace that I may love, honor, and invoke you, as the saints have done, that I may enter, like them, into the practice and spirit of devotion to you, so that I may experience, as they have done, that this devotion is truly the path to eternal life, and the pledge of everlasting salvation.

See *Résumés*, page 451.

80.—MEANS OF ACQUIRING DEVOTION TO MARY.

Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went his way, and sold all that he had, and bought it.—St. Matt. xiii. 46.

CONSIDERATION.

THE excellence and incomparable advantages of devotion to Mary should prompt us to neglect nothing to acquire and perfect it in our souls. It is a treasure which we should possess, no matter at what cost; it is a field exceeding perfect, which we must purchase and cultivate. But by what means can we procure that treasure? How shall we purchase and cultivate that field?

If we wish to become true servants of Mary, we must, first of all, ardently desire it, for to each of us she says: "I anticipate those that desire me, and first show myself to them." * We must also, at the same time, beg of God, by fervent prayers, to grant us this grace, for devotion to Mary, the Queen of Heaven, is a perfect gift which "comes down to us from the 'Father of lights.'" † Let us entreat our Lord to grant us this signal favor of loving, honoring, and invoking His most holy Mother, as she has been loved, honored, invoked, and imitated by so many souls whose protectress she has, in an especial manner, become, and who, by her assistance, have faithfully performed what she required of them, and have thus happily secured their eternal destiny.

Let us address ourselves to Mary herself, who is the channel of all graces, and beg of her to obtain for us that inestimable privilege of being wholly devoted to her. For the

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* See Wisdom vi. 14. † St. James i. 17.

same purpose, let us have recourse to the intercession of St. Joseph and St. John the Evangelist, those perfect models of love to the most holy Virgin, and to the intercession of the saints who have been most distinguished for that salutary devotion.

If we wish to be true servants of Mary, we must piously meditate on the mysteries in which she co-operated, reflect on her greatness, her virtues, and her glory, her power, her goodness, her patronage, and the devotion that ought to be paid to her, and the necessity of embracing and preserving the practice of it.

Meditation is the chief foundation of all devotion; by it, therefore, we must keep alive in our hearts the sacred fire of devotion to Mary. How, for instance, could he who meditates on the mysteries of the holy childhood of our Saviour, fail to be devoted to that loving Mother! Can we adore God come down upon earth, without honoring her by whom He came to us? Can we prostrate ourselves at the foot of the crib, without paying our homage to the Virgin Mother whom we see there prostrate with us? Can we thank the divine Child without, at the same time, thanking her in whose arms we behold Him?

It is so with the other mysteries; they naturally lead us to love and honor the most holy Virgin, to have confidence in her intercession, and the determined and efficacious wish to imitate her.

Was not this the feeling that actuated the saints every time they reflected on her perfections, her prerogatives, her mission, the part she took in the work of our redemption, the virtues she practiced, the glory she enjoys in Heaven, her goodness and love for us, and her protection in our regard? So it will be with us, if we meditate seriously on the same subjects.

If we wish to become true servants of Mary, we must embrace with earnestness and love the practices of devotion toward her, which, like all other devotions, has its own peculiar exercises, without which it cannot but become feeble and soon completely lost. Therefore, let us exactly, and with lively and filial affection, practice whatever our rules prescribe in this regard, and what we know our Superiors wish or require of us. Let us be all ardor for the honor of the Blessed Virgin, who is the Queen of Heaven and earth, and who is, at the same time, our good Mother; let us respect her holy name, honor her images, proclaim her praises, and say every day, with piety, our prayers in her honor, and particularly our rosary. Let us invoke her under all circumstances; let us go to her with all the affection and confidence of a child who goes to a beloved mother; let us read and circulate books calculated to make her known and loved; let us, as far as we can, raise up souls devoted to her; let us carefully train up our pupils to love, honor, and serve her; that fidelity and that zeal will help to develop in our own souls the devotion of which she is the object.

If we wish to become true servants of Mary we must be well convinced of the need we have of her assistance, either for ourselves or for those who are dear to us. Who can look upon the necessities of his poor soul and the souls of his neighbors, and not feel himself urged to raise his eyes to the Mother of mercy, and undertake everything to secure her loving protection? Who can, by the light of faith and reason, look on the dangers he runs, the enemies that assail him, and his own weakness, and not turn to the "powerful Virgin," who is the "help of Christians"?

Let us think how profitable true devotion to Mary will be to us during life, but especially at the hour of death. Let us think, also, on the advantages that will come to us from it after death, for everything tells us that Mary does not abandon the souls that have been devoted to her and are detained in purgatory. "What consolation," says Pere

Le Jeune, "what joy it must have been to the three Hebrews in the furnace, when they saw an angel hold back the raging flames and substitute in their stead a refreshing breeze!" So it is with a soul in purgatory that sees the Blessed Virgin come to it either to console or deliver it. Oh, how happy it then feels at having been her child, and her devoted child!

If we wish to become true servants of Mary we must avoid sin with the greatest care, and resolutely flee from the occasions of it, for whoever sullies his conscience by sin, offends the Mother by offending the Son, and from that moment, his relations with the most holy Virgin become weakened, until they cease entirely. Is it not a truth attested by experience, that devotion to Mary is, alas! soon lost, even to the last remnant of it, in those whose hearts are perverted, in whom sin no longer inspires any horror, while it is preserved or produces every day more abundant fruits in those souls that tremble at the very shadow of evil?

APPLICATION.

Such are the principal means given us to acquire, preserve, and perfect in ourselves devotion to the holy Mother of God. But do we make use of those means? Do we sincerely and ardently desire to be devoted to Mary, as so many souls have been who appeared to have no other thought or feeling but for her? Do we earnestly beg this of God by her intercession, and by that of the saints who particularly honored and served her?

What diligence do we use in meditating on the mysteries in which she co-operated, on her prerogatives, her virtues, her glory, and her patronage. Are we faithful observers of what our rules prescribe to honor her, thank her, and implore her intercession? How do we perform our different practices of piety in her honor, and, among others, the recital of the rosary? Have we a deep-seated conviction that her help is absolutely necessary for us? With a view to merit that help, and to preserve in our souls the sacred fire of devotion to that divine Mother, do we keep our hearts pure from every voluntary sin and ill-regulated affection?

Let us thoughtfully see what reformation is necessary on all these points, and at once enter on the salutary work. Let us prove that we sincerely wish to be devoted to our good Mother. Doubtless that will require, on our part, submission, perseverance, and courage against difficulties; but what then? It is devotion to Mary we are seeking, and that devotion, when it assumes its full character, means grace in this life and Heaven in the next.

PRAYER.

O Holy Virgin, my Mother and Patroness, my sins make me unworthy to approach you, nevertheless I cannot doubt that you wish to save me. Knowing how great is the tenderness of your heart, I place all my confidence in you, and I beg of you, O most charitable mediatrix, to obtain for me the grace of honoring, loving, praising, and serving you faithfully all the days of my life, for by that means I shall triumph over the enemies of my salvation, and shall come into the city of peace where you await me, and where, with the angels and saints, I shall praise your prerogatives and virtues through all eternity.

See *Résumés*, page 451.

81.—DEVOTION OF HONOR PAID TO MARY.

He who honoreth his mother, is as one that layeth up a treasure.—ECCLES. iii. 5.

CONSIDERATION.

"THE most Holy Virgin," says St. Francis of Sales, "is worthy of all the honor that can be given to any mere creature, angelic or corporeal, and all who are blessed with the spirit of Christianity love, reverence, and glorify her."

What titles she has to the esteem, respect, and veneration of men and angels! All must acknowledge that we should honor authority, dignity, virtue, knowledge, power, and glory; now, which of these prerogatives or qualities is not found, in the most sublime degree, in Mary?

Who has ever been invested with an authority like to that she has exercised, and still exercises, since during her life she had a right to command the King of kings, and now she rules as sovereign over all that is not God? In dignity, who has ever approached her? "Mary," says a pious author,* "is Mother, Daughter, Spouse of the Most High, the Queen of angels and saints, the Queen and Mother of the Church, the sovereign of Heaven and earth; what greatness, and who can measure its height?"

Who ever lived adorned with so many virtues as she of whom the Doctors of the Church have said: "All virtues are in her? She has the innocence of Abel, the faith of Abraham, the constancy of Josue, the piety of David, the wisdom of Solomon. . . . She surpasses Moses in meekness, Job in patience, Isaac in obedience, the mother of the Maccabees in courage, Judith in self-devotion, and Esther in prudence. She unites in herself all the qualities and merits of the most holy persons of antiquity, and of all those who, under the law of the Gospel, have walked so heroically in the footsteps of their divine Master.

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* M. Nicolas.

Who ever possessed true knowledge like this wise Virgin? Preserved from original sin, she was never subject to the ignorance that is its consequence; temple of the Holy Ghost, she was illumined by His divine light, more than the patriarchs and prophets together had been; therefore St. Bernard has said: "Mary penetrated into the depths of the abyss of the divine wisdom further than we can imagine, so that she is inundated with that inaccessible light, as much as it is possible for any creature to be."

Who ever exercised dominion like that powerful Virgin, whom the angelic hosts obey, who is all powerful over the Heart of God, and to whose prayers nothing can be refused? Who was ever so glorious as she whom God promised to the world in the beginning, whom He represented as destined to crush the serpent's head, and who did, in truth, crush it, by giving to us our Redeemer, and covering us with the shield of His protection against all the assaults of the enemy of our salvation? Oh! what a victory has she gained, through her divine Son, over death and hell!

Who has ever been extolled and honored like that daughter of David whom all generations call Blessed, before whose image the greatest on earth prostrate themselves, who is praised in Heaven by the choirs of angels, who has received respect and submission from the Word himself; for the Word of God became her Son, and honored her as no other child ever honored his mother.

Nothing can be more evident, then, than that Mary has every right to the esteem and veneration of men, and as the pious Gerson has written: "That which we have to fear in speaking of the Holy Virgin is that we do not praise her enough; when we desire to praise her, we can do so without fear, for our praises can never come up to what she deserves."

Thus, the Church pays her special honor, an honor, of course inferior to that paid to God, but superior to what is given to the angels and saints; she honors her in a special manner because she desires to enter into the designs of the Most High, who has placed her above everything but Himself.

All true Christians esteem it their happiness to praise her with the Church, to unite their voices with those of the saints and Doctors who, in all ages, have extolled her greatness, and with them to say to her: "Your glory, O Holy Virgin, is above all praise. Heaven and earth give you the reverence that is your due, and we all make it a duty to honor and praise you." * We hail you as full of grace and blessed among all women, you whom the inhabitants of earth and the angelic choirs call blessed." †

"We hail you, O Mother of the Sovereign King, ornament of Heaven, paradise of happiness and immortality, tree of life, lily of the valley, source of true consolations, fountain of grace, throne of glory, ark of the new covenant." ‡

"We hail you, O Immaculate Virgin, true and incomparable Mother of the Most High, temple of the living God, palace of the Royal King, sanctuary of the Holy Ghost, branch of the root of Jesse, cedar of Lebanon, sweet light shining on the heights of Nazareth, and constituting the joy of Israel and the ornament of the world." §

"O Mother of Grace, to whom could we compare you? You are the paradise of God." ||

"Be thou blessed, O happy Mother of the Eternal King,

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* St. Irenæus. † St. Athanasius. ‡ St. Ephrem. § St. Anselm. || St. Bernard.

who art the glory of Heaven, and the most powerful protector of the human race, and who, next to thy divine Son, hast dominion over all things." *

How greatly is Mary honored on earth where, in all places, and at all times, her prerogatives and virtues are the subject of praise! How above all is she honored in Heaven, where countless legions of angels and saints, with transports of ineffable admiration, praise the Queen whom they behold at the right hand of the Lamb, clothed with the sun, crowned with twelve stars, and shining with the brightness of God!

APPLICATION.

"In union with the Church in heaven and on earth, let us honor Mary with all the strength of our love, and all the ardor of our affections, for such is the will of Him who has raised her to the dignity of Mother of God, and who has wished that we should attain through her all graces." † "Let us remember that to honor Mary is to honor Jesus; for 'the praise of the Mother is the praise of the Son.'" ‡

Let us recall to mind and meditate on her prerogatives and virtues, and make it our happiness to proclaim them on all occasions. Let us celebrate, worthily, the feasts established in her honor, carefully preparing for them, entering into the spirit of each of them, assisting at the divine office with recollection, piety, love, and holy joy, and approaching, devoutly, to holy Communion.

Let us recite with regularity, edification, and fervor, the different prayers we offer up to her, and especially the rosary, that crown in her honor which her true servants love so much to place upon her brow. Let us reverence her holy name, her altars, her sanctuaries, her images, her relics, and all that recalls her memory.

Let us carefully instruct our pupils to give her the honor

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* Luis of Granada. † St. Bernard. ‡ Gerson.

that is her due, and which will be, to them, a source of so many graces. Let us strive above all to imitate her virtues, for that is the best means of honoring her and inducing others to honor her. No, let us not conform ourselves to a barren admiration of her holiness; let us strive to reproduce it in our conduct. Let us walk in the steps of our glorious Queen, so that, after having honored her on earth, we may be admitted to behold and praise her in heaven.

PRAYER.

O holy Virgin, great Mother of God, and my Mother, how sweet it is to me to meditate on your greatness, your prerogatives, your virtues, and your mission of mercy! How I love to thank the Lord for the favors with which He has enriched you, and to praise you for them and for all your goodness to men. Obtain for me, I beseech you, the grace of thoroughly comprehending and faithfully persevering in those dispositions. Grant, by your intercession, that my whole life may be one hymn of praise to you, and that my last sigh may be a homage to your glory. Yes, grant that I may die thanking you, for so to die would be but the beginning of a homage of thanks, offered you with the angels and saints, through a blissful eternity.

See *Résumés*, page 452.

82.—LOVE FOR MARY.

Amiable Mother, pray for us.—LITANY OF OUR LADY OF LORETTO.

CONSIDERATION.

NO one can contemplate, by the light of faith and reason, the prerogatives, virtues, qualities, and mission of Mary without being, at the same time, persuaded that there is every motive to make us love her with the greatest love after that we give to her divine Son.

Created to love God who is the Sovereign Beauty, and who alone can satisfy our hearts, how can we but love her who is the most perfect image of God, to whom He has communicated Himself without limit, whom He has made partaker in His goodness, in an almost infinite degree, and in whom He finds delight as in the masterpiece of His hands?

We love Jesus, that God who, for love, humbled Himself to us, so as to raise us up to Him, and who appears to the eyes of our soul full of all that deserves love. Now, love for this divine Saviour naturally associates with itself love for His most holy Mother. How, in truth, can we fix our hearts on the Infant God without loving her in whose arms we behold Him! What soul could be wholly devoted to the Redeemer without also loving the co-redemptrix, her who was united to Him in the work of our redemption, and who has so perfectly reproduced His divine features?

How many loving perfections are found in her whom the Church salutes under the title of "Amiable Mother," and whose prerogatives, virtues, and favors to the human race, the saints could never cease extolling! "O Holy Virgin," said St. Bernard, "you are the bright dawn whose splendor announced the rising of the Sun of Justice. No creature is so like to God as you are. O Mary, no one can pronounce your holy name without feeling his heart inflamed with love, and those who love you cannot even think of you without feeling themselves attracted to love you more." *

"Who is there that could help loving you, O most amiable Queen, who are sweetness, goodness, clemency, and gentleness itself. Hail, then, to you, O my Sovereign and my Mother, to you who are the happiness of my life and the treasure of my heart." †

We must love those who do good to us. But who has done good to us like Mary, and who has done it with so much liberality? It is by her that the author of all good has been given to us, He who is our light, our strength, our life, and our salvation; it is by her that we have received all the graces with which the Lord has favored us, graces at every instant, signal graces, invaluable graces. How can so many favors not awaken gratitude in our hearts, and fill us with the greatest love for her to whom we are indebted for them?

That love is in itself an inestimable treasure, for it secures us the protection of Mary, as the saints thus assure us: "O Holy Virgin, Mother of mercy, can you reject the hearts that love you, you who invite the impious man and the infidel to return, through you, to God." ‡ "Those who love you, O Mother of God, will enjoy great peace of mind, and their souls will never be lost." § "Yes, happy are those who love you, O Queen of Heaven! If I love Mary, I am sure of perseverance, and I shall obtain from God all that I ask." ||

Experience teaches that love begets love; that we are naturally inclined to love those that love us. How, then,

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* St. Bernard. † St. Bonaventure. ‡ St. Anselm.

§ St. Bonaventure. || The B. Berchmans.

ought we to love Mary, who has for us a love the most tender, the most active, most devoted, and most generous, and of which we may say: "Unite in one heart all the love of the most affectionate mothers, and you will not come near to the love that Mary bears for any one soul."* Yes, from the moment that she conceived in her virginal womb Him who is charity in its essence, she could not but love us with the same love with which He loved us, and which made Him give His life for us.

Therefore St. Liguori says, with St. Ignatius the martyr: "Children of Adam, love this divine Mother as much as you can; her love will always surpass yours. Yes, we have so much reason to love Mary, that if all the earth re-echoed with her praise, and all men gave their lives for her, it would be but a small return for the love she bears us."

Is not Mary our Mother? Did she not give us birth to the life of grace on Mount Calvary, when, through compassion, she endured in her heart all the sufferings of her crucified Jesus? Has not that divine Saviour given us to her as her children, in the person of the beloved disciple to whom He said, Behold thy Mother; and did He not show that He wishes us to love her as much as possible, as He Himself loved her?

Children of Mary, behold the heart of Jesus; consider with what burning love it is consumed for that Blessed Mother, and remember that it is the same fire with which your hearts should be consumed. Direct all your affections, then, towards her. Love her with all the powers of your soul, and do not cease to advance in that love, which, after love for Jesus, is of all love the most just, the most noble, the most holy, the most consoling, and the most profitable.

APPLICATION.

Let us love Mary as St. Anselm, St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, and St. Thomas Aquinas loved her, and say to her,

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* The Pere Nieremberg.

"O glorious Virgin, would that my heart might be always inflamed with love for you! Since you are all-powerful with God, grant that I may love you as you deserve. O my Queen, obtain for me the grace of loving your divine Son with a perfect love, and of loving you, next to Him, with all my heart and above everything."

Let us love Mary as St. Philip Neri loved her, who calls her "the delight of his heart;" as St. Alphonsus Rodriguez loved her, desiring to give his life in proof of his love; as St. Aloysius Gonzaga loved her, who, on hearing her holy name uttered, thrilled with inexpressible joy. Let us love her as St. Stanislaus Kostka did, who cried out: "How could I but love Mary; she is my mother," and who pronounced these words with such emotion and such an expression of countenance that he seemed an angel come down from heaven to preach love for that divine Mother.

Let us love Mary with a sincere love, proceeding from our convictions, proving itself by our works, and, principally, by our attention and fidelity to avoid what displeases her, and to do what she wishes and requires of us. Let us be ready to do and suffer the most difficult things for her, remembering that she did not hesitate to sacrifice Jesus Himself for love of us.

Let us love Mary with a filial love; let us have recourse to her with all the confidence of a child for a mother whose tenderness he knows. What can be sweeter to our heart than to love her who is our Mother in Heaven! Let us love Mary with a love of gratitude, remembering her kindness, extolling her goodness, her love, and her generosity.

Let us love Mary with a love superior to all but our love for God; let our love for her lead us not only to neglect nothing, but to undertake with pleasure everything that can raise up souls devoted to her, that can make her be known, loved, and served by those who are entrusted to our care and with whom we come in contact. Let us love her with a strong, constant, and increasing love, one that will outlive temptations and misfortunes, or, rather, which will not cease to increase, as the number of favors granted to us by this good Mother do not cease to increase, so that, having loved her more and more, we may be admitted among her most devoted servants, who love her and thank her in the happy abodes of Heaven.

PRAYER.

O Holy Virgin, my sweet Mother, who have so great a love for me, would that I had at my disposal the affection of all the angels and saints, that I might love you as they love you, and thus return the love of which I am the object! Accept, I beseech you, the offering I make of my heart and all my affections. Yes, I love you, next to Jesus, with my whole soul and with all my strength, and I purpose to prove it, above all, by my fidelity in walking in your footsteps, until I come to that abode where your servants glory in loving you forever.

See *Résumés*, page 452.

83.—GRATITUDE TO MARY.

Blessed art thou, O daughter, by the Lord the Most High God, because thou hast prevented our ruin.—JUDITH xiii. 23–25.

CONSIDERATION.

EVERY Christian, who considers the mission to which Mary has been appointed and the favors she bestows, knows that that Queen of mercy has every right to the gratitude of men; that there should unceasingly rise from earth to her throne of mercy, those words of thanksgiving so joyously addressed by the inhabitants of Bethulia to Judith:

"Blessed art thou, O daughter, by the Lord the Most High God, because thou hast prevented our ruin."

Mother of God, it is from her we have received Him who is our life, our light, and our happiness; she it was who attracted Him to earth by the charm of her virtue; she it was who clothed Him with our nature and gave Him that flesh and blood by the sacrifice of which He has made expiation for our sins, and which He gives us in the Sacrament of the altar to nourish our souls.

The mediatrix between God and us, the treasurer and dispenser of His graces, she solicits His goodness and liberality for us, and is the channel through which we receive all His bounty. After having given us the Redeemer, she communicated to us the fruits of our redemption. "The original source of the blood of Jesus Christ, it is from her," says Bossuet, "that that beautiful stream of graces begins to diffuse itself over our souls, bearing with it the spirit of life into the whole body of the Church."

If gratitude is one of the first duties of a child to its parents, and of a client to his benefactor, what should be our gratitude to our good Mother in Heaven! Let us remember that she gave us birth at the foot of the cross, by suffering unspeakable anguish, even in her inmost soul; that it is by her we have received the supernatural life which is infinitely more precious than the natural life; that by her prayers she has opened for us the treasures of the divine mercy; that she does not cease to watch over us and to assist us with the most tender, the most lively and the most affectionate solicitude.

Who can consider the effects of her love and goodness, and not share in the sentiments which a pious Bishop* has expressed in these words: "What thanksgiving our hearts owe to you, O Mary! Often have we sent up to you the cry of distress, and we have always received your protection in exchange for our prayers. From how many dangers have you preserved us! How many combats have you ended to the benefit of our souls! After how many falls have you raised us up! How often have you brought a remedy to our miseries! How well you know how to draw back those who are inclined to fall, to sustain those who are feeble, to raise from their grave those who are dead to grace!"

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* Mgr. Pavy.

In addition to the benefits that Mary confers on ourselves, personally, there are other causes for our gratitude in all the favors granted by her to the human race in general; to the Church, our country, our Institute, our families, our pupils, and our friends; to all those who are united to us by the bonds of charity, and to whose interests we cannot be indifferent.

But this is not saying enough; our gratitude should above all have for its object the unceasing care and inexpressible devotion of that divine Mother for Jesus the God of Love, who is our all, and with whom we are united as members to the head.

Let us thank her with all the gratitude of our hearts for the love toward her with which she has inspired us and for her love for us. Let us thank her in union with Jesus Himself, for her care and devotion toward Him. And, here, let us consider how great has been His gratitude. With what love, as child or youth, did He testify that He appreciated her solicitude and the sacrifices she imposed on herself for His sake! How sublime did these words become when repeated, as they must have been, many a time, by His adorable lips: "Thanks, my Mother, thanks!" Let us be happy to repeat them with Him under all circumstances. There is nothing more in unison with the spirit of the Church, than thus to render thanks to Mary for her kind and all-powerful protection. In her honor, sanctuaries are everywhere raised; her holy pictures are everywhere exposed to the eyes of the faithful, her feasts are multiplied, and all creatures are invited by the Church to praise her, as she sings in her office: "Nations that have been redeemed praise her, for by this spotless Virgin life has been given to you." * "Innocent youth, priests and devout faithful, celebrate with gratitude the favors of the Queen of Heaven." † "We have had recourse to Mary our hope, and Mary has succored us." ‡ "The life we had lost, O Mother of God, has been restored to us by you, who have received the Saviour as from Heaven, and given Him to the world." §

Gratitude toward Mary is one of the characteristics of the saints, who have all found pleasure in celebrating her greatness. "O Mother of mercy," said St. Anselm to her, "what tongue can express, or what intellect calculate, the number of captives of Satan whom you have restored to liberty by reconciling them with God!" ‖ "You are," says St. Bernard, "that generous and compassionate Rebecca, giving your favors not only to the just represented by Eliezer, but also to the sinners, represented by the camels of that servant of Abraham: like Rebecca, you give more than is asked of you." ¶ "How many benefits has the world received from you!" exclaims St. Bonaventure. "You are the advocate of the poor, the dispensatrix of graces, the salvation of those who invoke you. Praise, honor, power, and glory be yours for all eternity!"

All the saints, and particularly St. Leonard of Port Maurice, acknowledged that they had received no grace for which they were not indebted to the most holy Virgin. Thus, they began upon earth the hymn of gratitude which they now sing in Heaven, where, in the transports of unut-

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* Hymn, *O Gloriosa Virginum.*

† Office of our Lady "Help of Christians."

‡ Ibid.

§ Mass of our Lady of Mount Carmel.

‖ St. Anselm.

¶ St. Bernard.

terable happiness, they praise the goodness, love, and clemency of her by whom they escaped the tempests of hell, and came in safety to the harbor of eternal life.

APPLICATION.

Like the saints, and in union with them, let us be penetrated with the most lively, the most heartfelt and affectionate gratitude to Mary. Let us thank her for all her favors to us and those dear to us. Let us thank her for the grace of our religious vocation, in which we cannot doubt she had a great share.

Let us thank her with fervor, and let all our thanks come truly from the heart. Our prayers to her when asking a favor are sometimes so fervent; why should not our thanksgiving be equally so, when our request has been granted? Let us go, for this purpose, to our angel-guardian and holy patron, and beg them to unite with us, so that, through them, the thanksgiving we offer to the Queen of mercy may be worthy of her acceptance.

At every hour, at every instant, our good Mother covers us with the mantle of her protection, and gives us a share in the treasures which God has placed at her disposal: let us then thank her frequently, and let our gratitude be not only permanent, but progressive, as are the benefits that are its object.

Let us thank Mary by our thoughts, feelings, words, and works. Let us respond to her generous love for us, by the most lively affection and most ardent zeal for her glory.

Oh! what fruits of grace we should draw from such a practice! With gratitude to Mary there would be developed in our heart love for her, the desire to please her, and the will to serve her; our gratitude would call down additional favors upon us; the stream of her liberality would never cease to flow; she would show herself our Mother, protectress, and guide, until, by her assistance, we reached that happy country where the elect sing in her praise hymns of eternal gratitude.

PRAYER.

What recompense shall I make you, O Mary, for all the favors I have received through your mediation? How shall I worthily thank you for the favors your charitable hands have lavished on me, favors that you have drawn from the wound in the side of your divine Son, which is to us an inexhaustible source of every saving grace? I desire, O amiable Mother, to love you, and to devote myself, unreservedly and with delight, to your services. Grant that it may be so, and that, after having testified my gratitude to you upon earth, I may be admitted to join the saints in Heaven who praise your goodness through all eternity:

See *Résumés*, page 453.

84.—ON THE IMITATION OF MARY.

Let this woman be an example of virtue, and let her name become famous. — RUTH iv. 11.

CONSIDERATION.

MEN need a model of perfection by which, with the assistance of divine grace, they may shape their conduct and attain to sanctity. That model is, first of all, our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the Heavenly Father has said: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." *

But that adorable Master being at once God and man, it entered into the merciful designs of His providence to offer us models of perfection coming nearer to ourselves, which we find in the angels and saints, but, above all, in the most Blessed Virgin.

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* St. Matth. xvii. 5.

Filled with all graces and corresponding to each one of them, that divine Mother is, next to her adorable Son, the type and ideal of perfection, "the model of all creatures."* All virtues shine in her with an incomparable splendor. "Her faith is greater than Abraham's; her purity, a jewel that nothing can tarnish; her humility so great that she calls herself the handmaid of the Lord, at the time that she was invested with the sublime dignity of Mother of God; her generosity raises her sacrifice above all others; her courage surpasses in Heaven that of any other creature in the world's history, and her piety fills with admiration the angels themselves." †

What marvels of grace take place in her soul. "To love God in silence, to wish to possess Him alone, to love nothing but Him, to suffer all things in a spirit of love," ‡ to unite prayer with work, to submit to authority from the purest of motives, to burn with charity and zeal for her neighbor, to shun the world so as to keep united with God; behold in this description, the whole tenor of her life. Therefore it is that the Church extols as much as possible the virtues of that glorious Virgin whom she calls "most pure Mother," "Mirror of justice," and "Seat of wisdom," and of whom she says that she merited to become the mother of our Saviour.

Animated by the spirit of the Church, let us look upon Mary as the model of sanctity we ought to imitate, and let us labor for this purpose with ardor, courage, and perseverance. Let us not forget that it is an essential part of devotion to our good Mother; for, as St. Liguori says, to seek to imitate her is the surest means of pleasing her, of proving that we love her, and of becoming the recipients of her favors. "Those," says St. Richard, of Laurence, "have a right to call themselves the true children of Mary, who strive to imitate her, by modelling their lives upon hers."

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* St. Ambrose. St. Augustine. † Mgr. Pavy. ‡ Fénelon.

Ah! it is unquestionably meritorious to proclaim with our voices and sing with the Church her prerogatives and merits; but nothing we can do can so honor her as to walk faithfully in her footsteps and try to reproduce her virtues; and supposing this to be omitted, our devotion to her would evidently be incomplete, defective, and, perhaps, illusive.

It is a well-known truth that when we truly love we seek to become like the object we love; if, then, concludes St. Jerome, we love Mary, we should strive to be truly like her, by the imitation of her most holy life. She is our Mother, and it is our delight to call her by that name so dear to our hearts; but is it not an established rule, that there should be a resemblance between the mother and her children? She is our protectress; but nothing can make her so favorable to us as fidelity in following her example.

"We must," says St. Liguori, "strive, to the best of our power, to imitate the most holy Virgin, if we wish to share in her graces and be enriched by her favors."

With what delight does Mary look upon those among her servants, who truly endeavor to imitate her virtues! Oh! how she loves to watch them tread the path of virtue that she has trod before them! How happy she is to see them strive to reproduce in their hearts her charity, her purity, her humility, her obedience, her meekness, and her spirit of sacrifice, while correcting whatever in their conduct is opposed to hers, and becoming more and more like to her every day! Yes, that is the sweetest consolation to her motherly heart; on such she makes it her happiness to lavish her care, and exercise, in their regard, the most generous liberality.

She assists them during life; she defends them, enlightens them, consoles, encourages, and strengthens them, making them surmount every obstacle to their sanctification, leading them, as it were, by the hand in the narrow way that leads to Heaven.

She assists them, above all, in the hour of death, for, says St. Ambrose, she intercedes specially for them with God, applying to herself these words of Jesus Christ: "Father, I will that where I am they also whom thou hast given me may be with me." *

Happy, then, are they who walk in thy footsteps, O divine Mother of the author of all graces. Nothing is wanting to them: grace is given them, through your mediation, in abundance and superabundance, and by it they become more and more worthy to share in the glory with which the Lord crowns your virtues.

APPLICATION.

If we sincerely desire to give glory to Mary, to become pleasing to her, and to secure her assistance, let us take her as our guide, and follow her in the path of perfection in which she has preceded us.

Let us study that incomparable model placed before our eyes, and on which we are, at this moment, meditating. Let us observe the distinguishing traits of her character, and engrave them on our hearts, while forming the firm resolution of correcting whatever there may be in our conduct opposed to them.

Mary was without sin; do we not sin every day? Mary, although exempt from concupiscence and confirmed in grace, avoided, most carefully, every dangerous occasion; and we, so prone to evil, do we not seek the danger? Mary led a life of retreat and mortification; and we who know how dangerous the world is, do we not love to frequent it?

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* St. John xvii. 11–24.

Mary was submissive to God, and to those whom God placed over her; and we, do we not continue attached to our own will? Mary carefully observed silence; and we, who have so often felt the injury that the abuse of our tongue has brought to our souls, do we not constantly violate this virtue?

Mary never lost sight of God, lived only for Him, and sought only to please Him; and we, do we not neglect to keep ourselves ever in His holy presence?

Mary unceasingly acquired new merits by her fidelity to the graces with which God favored her; and we, do we not remain stationary, or are we not rather going backward instead of advancing?

Have we not too much reason to feel ashamed that we spend our lives so differently from our holy model! Let us then humble ourselves, and make haste to amend our conduct. Let us courageously undertake that work, and follow it up with perseverance. It will doubtless require many efforts, many sacrifices; but let us not hesitate; it involves the glory of God, the glory of our good Mother, and the dearest interests of our souls. Moreover, Mary herself will come to our aid, and with her assistance nothing will be impossible, or even difficult.

Let us be zealous in teaching our pupils to imitate Mary. Let us make them know and admire her virtues, make them fully understand the motives they have for practicing them, and let us teach them by our words, and still more by our example, what they ought to do to prove themselves her true children, and thus merit her protection.

PRAYER.

O Holy Virgin, seat of divine wisdom, mirror of justice, temple of all virtues, I honor you as the most perfect image of your adorable Son, and I choose you as my guide and my model. Deign, then, to obtain for me the grace of walking in your footsteps, without deviating from the path you have followed. Grant, by your intercession, O my loving Mother, that my heart may become more and more conformable to yours, until the day shall come when your divine Son will be pleased to reward my fidelity by making me a participator in your happiness.

See *Résumés*, page 453.

85.—DEVOTION OF INVOCATION DUE TO MARY.

We will call upon thee by name; we will relate thy wondrous works. —Ps. lxxiv. 2.

CONSIDERATION.

"MY brethren," says St. Bernard, "go to Mary; have recourse to Mary with all the ardor of affectionate love of which you are capable." Let us cheerfully and eagerly embrace this invitation, which is likewise given to us by all the Fathers and ministers of the Church, and naturally flows from our own belief respecting the most holy Virgin.

Let us invoke Mary. She is all-powerful over the heart of her divine Son. Daughter of the Father, Mother of the Son, Spouse of the Holy Ghost, the first among the elect, she presents herself before the throne of the Most High, certain of obtaining all she asks. Her divine Son, who wishes to glorify her above all creatures, takes delight in granting, in the fullest extent, every position she presents on our behalf. "O holy Virgin," says St. Peter Damian, addressing her, "all power is given to you in Heaven and on earth; vouchsafe, then, to intercede for me with your divine Son, so that, having been an obedient and faithful child of yours in this life, I may merit the happiness of being with you forever in the next."

Let us invoke Mary. God, who has placed in her hands all the graces which He has destined for us, has confided to her the mission of assisting us; Jesus Christ, in appointing her our Mother, desires that she should fulfil all the functions of that relation, and that she should feel the tenderest solicitude in our temporal and eternal welfare. Let us, then, fly to her for succor, and, with the Pere de Grenada, thus address her: "It is you, O most charitable Mediatrix, who are the guiding-star of our voyage through life, and who diffuse through our souls the gifts of divine grace. Adopt me, O most holy Virgin, as your child, and grant that I may be numbered with those who love you, whose names are registered in your heart, and who, at all times, are covered with the shield of your protection."

Let us invoke Mary. She is our strength against the enemies of our salvation; against the allurements of the world, our passions and the devil. Is she not the Mother of God, our Saviour, who has said: "I have overcome the world"?* Is she not the immaculate Virgin, whose very name kindles the fires of virtue in the soul, and who crushed, under her heel, the malignant serpent?

Let us invoke Mary. She desires our happiness. Mother of all the unhappy children of Adam, her compassion and mercy know no limits. For us, she has, in truth, a fond Mother's heart, more anxiously wishing to help us than we ourselves can desire to be helped, and seeking every opportunity to lavish on us those treasures of grace with which she overflows, and grieved only when we fail to seek her generous liberality.

Let us invoke Mary. Nothing is more in unison with the spirit of our holy religion. Do we not hear the Church unceasingly invoke her holy name, implore her assistance, and repeat to her, under some form or other, that prayer of St. Augustine: "Holy Mary, succor the afflicted, strengthen the faint-hearted, console the distressed, pray for the people, intercede for the clergy and for all who desire to be servants of God. Let all who honor thy name, experience thy protection." * Does she not conclude her offices with a prayer in honor of that divine Mother, whom she thus addresses: "Mother of our Redeemer, come to the assistance of all who desire to rise from sin. Glorious Virgin, Queen of Heaven, Mother of mercy and our advocate, pray for us that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ." And does not our holy Church summon us, three times a day, to pray to Mary, by reciting the *Angelus*, or rather, is she not constantly inviting us to implore her assistance? How often do the ministers of God call on us to raise our eyes to Mary? How often do they say to us: "Invoke Mary, and, through her, you will receive grace, and, through grace, salvation!"

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* St. John xvi. 33.

Let us remember how devoutly the saints hastened to prostrate themselves at the feet of Mary, and with what ardor and perseverence they besought her maternal protection. Thus, we hear them address her: "Intercede for us, O mother of God; † beseech the Lord to save us; ‡ look favorably upon us. § Forget not your servants, sustain their devotion, confirm their faith, bring back to the one fold all who have separated from the true Church, give peace to the world, and deliver us from every danger." ||

"Glorious Queen of Heaven, who hast dominion even over the powers of hell, disarm the devils who seek our souls, and call upon the angels to shield us with their protection.¶ O Virgin overflowing with grace, it is not for yourself alone that you have been enriched with these hea-

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* Ant. Sancta Maria, succurre miseris.

† St. Athanasius.

‡ St. Chrysostom.

§ St. Basil.

|| St. Germanus.

¶ St. Bonaventure.

venly favors, but that you may share them with us, so as to assist us in our necessities. Vouchsafe, from your throne of glory, where you reign, to look down upon us your servants, and help us, by your powerful assistance, to reach our eternal home." *

Let us invoke Mary. The experience of the Church in every age establishes the fact that she is never invoked in vain. How many monuments attest this truth? How many inscriptions, for example, in her sanctuaries which record the simple though touching words: "I prayed to Mary, and she heard me!"

Through the prayers of her servants, Mary has, by her intercession, converted sinners, healed the sick and infirm, driven away pestilence, calmed the tempest, and even restored the dead to life. Which one of us has not experienced her protection when besought with sincerity and fervor? How many times has she enlightened our understanding when perplexed with doubt? How often has she sent us solace in our sufferings, consolation in our griefs, strength and courage in our labors, and victory in our struggles with the enemy of our salvation!

It is, then, undeniably true that no act of worship is supported by more irrefragable or more universal authority than the devotion of Invocation which we offer to our Mother in heaven; that everything exhorts and urges, nay, makes it obligatory on us, to implore her for ourselves and for our neighbor, and to do so with a sincerity and fervor that will give us an assurance that we shall be heard.

APPLICATION.

Let us invoke Mary at all times, but especially in our trials, temptations, and perplexities. When the blasts of the tempest distract our souls; when all is trouble and dis-

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* St. Liguori.

order in our poor hearts, let us raise our eyes to the "Star of the Sea," and say, through our tears, "O Mary, save me!"

But let our supplications be fervent; let them proceed from a soul deeply conscious of its own weakness, its dangers, and its wants, and fully comprehending the power and the goodness of the Most Holy Virgin whom it addresses.

Let us address her in the words of one of her devoted servants: "O sweet hope of Christians, come to my aid. Ah! if you forsake me, to whom should I look for support? If you forget me, who will bestow on me a thought? If you withdraw your guiding hand while I am on the voyage to the haven of eternal peace, what but shipwreck can await me?" *

Let us invoke Mary with confidence: she is the Queen of mercy, and her power is without limit. Let not the sight of our own unworthiness prevent us from supplicating her bounty. Let us lay before her the object of our petition, and then add, in the words of the pious Louis de Grenada: "I ask much in view of my numerous sins, which render me so unworthy of your favor; but it seems little when I consider your power, for what can I ask that could equal your power to give?" Let us ask of Mary such temporal blessings as may be really advantageous to us, but let us beg her, more particularly, and with a fixed purpose of profiting by them, for such graces in the supernatural order as may be necessary for our sanctification.

Happy are they who thus understand the devotion of Invocation we should offer to Mary. They secure the protection of that tender Mother, and, by that protection, the means of advancing from virtue to virtue, of making great progress in the way of perfection, of fulfilling their destiny, and, finally, of being admitted to the glories of heaven, where they will forever praise and glorify her, through whose protection they have worked out their salvation.

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* The Pere Louis de Grenada.

PRAYER.

O Mary, Mother of my Saviour, and my Mother, receive my supplications, although they proceed from unworthy lips. With that maternal generosity for which we extol you, beg thy divine Son, who is my Master and my God, to grant me the grace of being your true servant, and, as a pledge that He has mercifully heard your prayers, to enable me to supplicate you with faith, fervor, confidence, and perseverance; for to pray to you thus is to be assured of your protection, to become the object of God's favor, to work zealously for my salvation, and to advance more and more every hour in the path of holiness which conducts to everlasting glory.

See *Résumés*, page 454.

86. — ON THE ANGELICAL SALUTATION.

Hail Mary, full of grace. — ST. LUKE i. 28.

CONSIDERATION.

IT is only necessary to consider what is the angelical salutation, in order to understand how great is the excellence of that prayer which, divine in its origin, and universal throughout the Catholic Church, recalls the most consoling reminiscences, and awakens in the soul the most sublime and admirable sentiments.

The Angel Gabriel, announcing to Mary the mystery of the Incarnation, thus addressed the august Virgin: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women." Soon after, Elizabeth, taking up the closing words of the angelic salutation, "Blessed art thou among women," added to them, "and blessed is the fruit of thy womb."

These two salutations of the angel and Elizabeth the Church has united into one, and added a supplication eminently adapted to draw down upon us the protection of the august Mother of God. But the angel, Elizabeth, and the Church having spoken only as inspired by the Holy Ghost, He is the true author of that prayer which the faithful of all ages have delighted to repeat.

"Always and in all places," says St. Francis de Sales, "have the children of the Church, as if with one voice and heart, saluted the Mother of God with this angelical Salutation, *Ave Maria*. Our immediate forefathers, practicing what came down to them from their ancestors, repeated every hour the *Ave Maria*, believing that they thus made themselves acceptable to the heavenly King by honoring His Most Holy Mother. They believed that nothing was more conducive to that end than when honoring Mary, to imitate God Himself, who honored her in so super-eminent a degree, and in her also honored all mankind, on that day when He assumed our human nature.

"O holy salutation! O sublime panegyric, dictated by God Himself, pronounced by the angel and by Elizabeth, repeated throughout all ages, from the very dawn of Christianity, and which, as little children, we learned to lisp at the knees of our pious mothers!"

How sweet and consoling it is to us to unite with the whole Christian world in glorifying Mary, by offering to her this beautiful prayer, and thus, in so efficacious a manner, invoking her protection.

How dear to our hearts should this prayer be, the first, perhaps, our mothers taught our infant lips to utter. What sweet thoughts, what pleasing memories does it not awaken!

It brings before our mind that moment of sovereign mercy, when the Son of God became our brother that He might save us; when Mary became the Mother of God and our mother; when that tribute of praise first commenced that is offered to her, and will continue to be offered to the end of time.

Yes, those words of the angel, "the most sublime ever addressed to a creature," that benediction of Elizabeth, the names of Jesus and Mary, so delightful to the ears of a Christian, the prayer to Mary as the Mother of God, the supplication for her assistance, "now and at the hour of our death;" these all speak feelingly and impressively to the attentive soul, penetrate its very depths, and enkindle in it the most devout and tenderest sentiments.

"*Hail!*" this is no ordinary expression of respect; it is the homage of most profound veneration paid to Mary by a Prince of the heavenly court, and, after Him, by the whole Christian world. "When the humble daughter of David," says a learned author,* "heard that salutation for the first time, she conceived the Word of God in her virginal womb; and when human lips repeat those words that proclaimed her divine maternity now, her heart thrills at the recollection of that moment that has no parallel in Heaven or on earth."

"Hail, *Mary!*" Oh! how sweet and consoling it is to pronounce that name! It is the name of the Mother of our Redeemer; it is the name of the Most Blessed Virgin through whom salvation has come to us; it is the name of our good Mother whom God has made the channel of His mercies; it is the name of the new Eve who is our hope and our life.

"Hail, Mary, *full of grace!*" Mary is here exhibited to us as enriched with all gifts of the Holy Ghost, as the infinite treasure of all those gifts, and as an unfathomable abyss of grace.† Yes, Immaculate Virgin, you are rich in all the gifts of God, and you made them fruitful by faithfully corresponding to all His designs. To others, portions of grace, more or less abundant, are given; but to you is given the fulness — even the very author of grace.

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* Pere Lacordaire. † Bull *Ineffabilis.*

"*The Lord is with thee.*" He has been with thee from the first moment of thy Immaculate Conception; He was with thee when the Word became incarnate in thy virginal womb, and, also, by His filial subjection to thee during more than thirty years. He is with thee in Heaven; where He has raised thee to a participation of His infinite glory.

"*Blessed art thou among women.*" This was proclaimed by the Holy Ghost, by the lips of the Angel Gabriel and of Elizabeth. Thou art incomparably more holy than Eve when she came forth from the hand of the Creator, more wise than Deborah, more virtuous than Esther, more valiant than Judith. No; no creature in Heaven or on earth can ever be as worthy as you of being called blessed.

"*And blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.*" It is in your Son, Jesus, that all nations are blessed. It is of His fulness that you have received all you possess, and it is to Him we owe thanks for all the blessings we receive, for time and for eternity. He is worthy of honor, glory, and power forever and ever. Blessed, then, be His holy name, and blessed also be thou with Him.

"*Holy Mary, Mother of God.*" What dignity has ever approached to yours, and who can be compared to you? The Word of God has become your Son! Ah, remember that, in choosing you for His Mother, He gave you absolute power over His Sacred Heart.

"*Pray for us.*" Mother of God, you are also our Mother. Oh, show us your maternal love by obtaining for us the necessary graces to escape from every danger, and arrive at that blessed abode where you will be ready to receive us, and to which all our hopes are directed.

"Pray for us, *sinners.*" We are your sick, infirm, unhappy children; take pity on us, because of our infirmities.

"Pray for us *now*." Alas! at this very moment, in which we supplicate you, we are in the midst of danger. This life is but a continued warfare — a trial. If you abandon us but an instant, O treasure of grace, that instant we fall.

"Pray for us now, *and at the hour of our death*." O grant, we beseech you, that, at that terrible hour, we may be found reconciled to your divine Son. Defend us against the last assaults of the devil, and abandon us not until you have conducted us into Heaven.

APPLICATION.

How much reason have we to esteem and love the angelical salutation, that prayer so beautiful, so glorious to Mary, so eminently proper to entitle us to her powerful protection, and which the Church has placed after the "Our Father" — the grandest of all prayers.

Let us repeat it, not only frequently, but devoutly, that is, with faith, piety, respect, love, and confidence. Let our hearts be deeply penetrated with the thoughts and sentiments of which it is the expression. Let the praises and the prayer that our lips offer to Mary, come from devout and pious hearts. Ah! where there is true, sincere love for Mary, with what happiness is that divine Mother saluted as "Full of grace and blessed among women"! Ah! if we were only conscious of our misery, and could properly appreciate the help which she is willing and able to render us, with what ardor would we beseech her to pray for us, all the time, but particularly at that dreadful moment which is to decide our eternal destiny!

Let us take care that our pupils, devoutly and understandingly, recite the angelical salutation; and when reciting it ourselves, let us guard against every kind of distraction, and keep the eyes of the soul steadily fixed on the Most Blessed Virgin whom we address. Let us salute her in union with the Angel Gabriel, or with the nine choirs of angels; let us salute her with Saint Elizabeth, and with all pious souls who have exalted her in the most perfect manner; and, finally, let us salute her with the Church, which glorifies her in so many forms, and so earnestly and unceasingly implores her protection.

PRAYER.

Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

See *Résumés*, page 454.

87. — THE BEADS, OR ROSARY.

I will praise thy name continually. — ECCLES. li. 15.

CONSIDERATION.

THE ROSARY is one of those pious exercises in honor of Mary which cannot be too highly estimated, because it is a beautiful combination of the most excellent prayers. In addition to the sign of the cross, with which we commence, and the versicle, *Dignare me, etc.*, with its response, *Da mihi, etc.*, which follows, and by which each of us asks: "Make me worthy to praise you, O holy Virgin; grant that I may triumph over your enemies," the Rosary consists of the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Angelical Salutation, and the *Gloria Patri*.

And what can we conceive more sublime than that profession of faith which has come down to us from the Apostles; which the Church has ever proclaimed as the foundation of its belief; which has been on the lips of so many confessors and martyrs; which unites in one common brotherhood, the intellects and hearts of all the faithful; which is the summary of our belief, the distinctive mark of a Christian, and the formula of our adhesion to the divinely-taught doctrines of the Church?

And how incomparably grand is that prayer which we call the Lord's Prayer, which Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and by which, invoking our Father who is in Heaven, we ask of Him, and in the proper order, all that we should ask either for ourselves or for our neighbor?

What prayer could we address to the Most Blessed Virgin more acceptable to her than that which, begun by the Angel Gabriel, continued by Elizabeth, has been completed by the Church; a prayer which embodies the most perfect eulogy of the glory of Mary, and the most appropriate supplication to secure for us the protection of the august Mother of God, both now and at the hour of our death?

How beautiful, also, the short doxology, that liturgical prayer of adoration which the Church so frequently repeats, and by which we give glory to the Most Blessed Trinity, the Alpha and Omega of all things, and to whom belongs all honor and glory now and forever!

Ah! how can we worthily realize the sublime excellence of a devotion composed of these elements, especially when it is accompanied with meditations on the mysteries of the most holy Rosary, that is, the mysteries of our redemption, which were, to the Most Blessed Virgin, the source of alternate joy, sorrow, and triumph!

The excellence of the Rosary is also manifested in its origin and history. In accordance with a custom, observed in the East, of honoring persons distinguished either by their personal merit or official dignity, the Christians were in the habit of presenting to Mary a crown of flowers, until St. Gregory of Nazianzen, in an ecstacy of his devotion to Mary, was inspired to substitute, for the crown of flowers, a spiritual crown, by offering to the august Virgin prayers of praise. Besides, the Anchorites, when they could not recite the Psalter, were accustomed to substitute, in its stead, a certain number of *Pater* and *Aves*, which they counted by using grains of barley or small pebbles.

Carrying out the idea of St. Gregory Nazianzen, and acting on the expedient of the Anchorites, St. Bridget,* Patroness of Ireland, toward the close of the fifth century, established the practice of honoring Mary by a collection of prayers most ordinarily used in the Church, arranged in a certain order and counted by grains or beads of different size, strung together and forming a kind of crown. And, lastly, St. Dominic gave to this devotion its special character. That zealous apostle, while beseeching Mary to crown his ministry with success, and obtain the conversion of the Albigenses, saw, in a vision, that Queen of mercy, who consoled him and, at the same time, informed him that great effects would be wrought by a simple exposition of faith united to the pious recitation of the "Our Father" and the "Hail Mary."

Docile to the inspiration which he received in this vision, he adopted, as his symbol, the Rosary, consisting of three chaplets or fifteen decades, and to these he applied the fifteen mysteries, which he illustrated and explained to his hearers with irresistible eloquence. Immediately, the crowds that flocked to hear his discourses became so numerous that the churches could not contain them; heretics and sinners were converted by thousands, and the face of the world was, so to speak, entirely changed.

From that time, the Rosary has never ceased to be a universal practice in the Church, earnestly recommended by the Sovereign Pontiffs, who have enriched it with the most precious indulgences. Religious Orders and great numbers of pious Christians have imposed on themselves the sweet obligation of reciting it daily. It has proved the consolation and strength of the saints of every age, and among them, of St. Francis de Sales, who bound himself by a vow to recite it every day.

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* Not St. Bridget who was born in 1302.

But do not facts demonstrate that nothing can be more salutary or better founded than this appreciation of the Rosary? How many triumphs of the Church can be ascribed to this holy practice! Does not the Feast of the most holy Rosary recall to our minds the Victory of Lepanto, so decisive of the overthrow of Mussulman barbarians in Europe? And how many other victories of a similar kind, or in the purely spiritual order, have not been achieved by means of this salutary devotion?

The Rosary is the support of piety, a source of consolation and light; a vital element of strength in the practice of virtue, and a powerful weapon in our conflicts against the devil, the world and the flesh. The prayers of which it is composed constitute a heavenly manna, which, though always the same, is endued with a variety of tastes, and amply satisfies all the wants of the soul.

In reciting it piously, we honor Mary, for as often as we say "Hail," so often do we renew, to a certain degree, the homage which was paid to her by the Angel Gabriel; we keep alive in our souls the remembrance of the mysteries of our divine Saviour, and we secure for ourselves the special protection of our Good Mother; a protection that extends to our families, our Institute, our pupils; a protection which embraces all our wants, and through which we shall obtain an abundance of graces during our lives, and particularly at the hour of our death.

APPLICATION.

Let us do everything in our power to derive from this pious exercise the fruits of grace and benediction which belong to it.

Let us be exact in reciting the Rosary, not only as a community exercise, but, also, when walking along the streets, as our rules enjoin. Oh! how edifying it is to see Religious praying to Mary while going wherever holy obedience calls them, and invoking her protection against every kind of danger and her blessing on their ministry!

Let us accompany the recitation of our beads with a meditation on the mysteries of the Rosary, remembering, moreover, that no effort of reflection is needed, but a simple glance of the soul on Jesus and Mary, in the circumstances under which we consider them, and appropriate aspirations of the soul toward that divine Master and His Most Holy Mother.

Let us always carry our beads on our person; it is a part of our livery which we should never cast aside. Let us instil into the hearts of our pupils the love and practice of this devotion. Ah! what blessings descend upon a class in which every member has his beads and piously recites them! We desire to do all the good we can among children and young men; let us, then, employ the means that never fail. How happy we shall be, if, by example and precept, we are zealous in promoting the devotion of the Rosary, for Mary will reward our piety with an abundance of the graces that shall crown our perfection. Yes, we will secure our own salvation, and contribute to the salvation of others; and when death shall call us from this world of suffering, the Blessed Virgin, to whom we have so often presented the crown of spiritual flowers, called the Rosary, will place on our brow the crown of glory which adorns her followers in Heaven.

PRAYER.

"O Mary, Virgin Most Holy and worthy of all veneration, I beseech you, by that salutation which Gabriel addressed to you when announcing the mystery of our redemption, hear my prayer." * Obtain for me the grace to honor you as I should do, and, to that end, to recite the Rosary with faith, piety, and love.

O divine Mother of my Saviour, obtain for me, also, the grace that I may produce abundant fruit among the children and youths confided to my care, and raise from among them servants who shall be devoted to you. All the desire of my heart is to glorify you and to induce others to glorify you. Oh! grant that this desire may be fully gratified, and that, having honored you every day of my life, I may be found worthy of your protection at the hour of my death. Amen.

See *Résumés*, page 455.

88.—THE LITANY OF THE MOST BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

Pray for thy servants to the Lord thy God.—KINGS xii. 19.

CONSIDERATION.

AS it would be impossible, in a single meditation, to consider, one by one, the titles which compose the Litany of the Most Blessed Virgin, we shall group together, in one general view, the subjects composing this beautiful prayer, so precious to pious souls, and, at the same time, containing the most glorious eulogy of our good Mother and the most appropriate prayer to secure for ourselves her loving protection.

Like every other Litany, indeed, like every other prayer, it consists of three parts: the introduction, the supplication, or purport of the prayer, and the conclusion.

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* St. Anselm.

In the introduction, we address ourselves to God or to Jesus Christ, and we do this in a manner most expressive of what we are and what we need: "Lord, have mercy on us." Thus, in the very first word, we proclaim the sovereign dominion of God over all things; we adore Him as our Supreme Master, and, acknowledging our wretchedness, we beseech Him to have mercy on us.

In the second and third invocation, we implore Him, "who is the one mediator of God and man,"* and say "Christ, hear us, Christ graciously hear us;" after which we address each of the persons of the Most Blessed Trinity, and then, the Blessed Trinity itself.

Here ends the introduction, in which we have addressed God, through Jesus Christ, and directly besought divine mercy. But as we need, as the result of our own unworthiness, a mediation of grace between us and Jesus Christ, we address ourselves to the most holy Mother, who, since she is our Mother also, takes delight in interceding for us with her divine Son.

The supplications to Mary which compose the body of the prayer are varied, and so rich in thought, that they may be said to comprise, in substance, all that has ever been written or spoken in praise of the most holy Mother of God. They refer to Mary, considered either in herself, in her mission of mercy, or in her exalted dignity as Queen of Heaven.

The first invocation, "Holy Mary, pray for us," contains that name so grand, so beautiful, so noble, so full of consolation, so powerful against Satan, so efficacious in raising our thoughts to Heaven, and kindling in our hearts the holiest emotions. It contains also that petition which is repeated to the end, and by which we solicit Mary to give us the assistance of her prayers.

In the second invocation, we say to her: "Holy Mother of God," and in the third, "Holy Virgin of virgins," thus ascribing to her, and first of all, the most glorious titles, honoring alike her divine maternity, which is the source, the living fountain from which all her other prerogatives flow, and her virginal purity, by which she merited all the favors which were lavished on her in such abundance.

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* 1 Tim. ii. 5.

Having invoked her as "Mother of God" and "Virgin of virgins," we return to the former of these titles, repeating it, under different aspects, and specifying the virtues by which Mary merited the dignity referred to. "Mother of Christ, Mother of divine grace, Mother most pure, Mother most chaste, . . . Mother of our Creator, Mother of our Redeemer."

Returning again to the title of "Virgin," we extol the virtues and exalt the glory and the patronage of the Mother of God, whom we invoke as, "Virgin most prudent, Virgin most venerable, Virgin most renowned, Virgin most powerful, Virgin most merciful, Virgin most faithful."

But when we consider that these two titles of "Mother of God" and "Virgin of virgins" unite in the same person, the soul experiences a holy enthusiasm, under the influence of which it resorts, so to speak, to metaphorical language to celebrate the greatness of Mary. Hence we apply those beautiful and glorious titles: "Mirror of justice, Seat of wisdom, . . . Spiritual Vessel, Vessel of singular devotion, Mystical Rose, Tower of David, Tower of ivory, House of God, Ark of the covenant, Gate of Heaven, Morning Star." Each one of these metaphors pictures to the mind the prerogatives, the virtues, and the protection of Mary, who, in truth, is the mirror reflecting the justice and holiness of God; the seat of wisdom, a vessel of honor, adorning the altar of the Most High; a mystical rose, exhaling the most delicious perfumes, and beautiful to behold; a tower of strength for the protection of Christians against the assaults of hell; . . . the Morning Star, announcing to the world the rising of the Sun of justice.

But now we contemplate Mary under a different aspect: we behold her in her relations to ourselves, who, alas! are so weak, so poor, so afflicted, and we beseech her to come to our assistance. Oh! how touching are those simple invocations, by which, from the very depths of our misery, we supplicate the Mother of God to come to our help: "Health of the weak, Refuge of sinners, Comfortress of the afflicted, Help of Christians!" Oh! when these invocations are fervently repeated, how powerful is their effect on that merciful and compassionate heart!

The Church, however, does not wish us to close these supplications to Mary with words expressive only of our own misery. She, therefore, salutes her as "Queen of Heaven, conceived without sin," in these words: "Queen of angels, Queen of patriarchs, Queen of apostles, Queen of martyrs, Queen of confessors, Queen of virgins, Queen of all saints, Queen conceived without sin."

Lastly, there comes the third part of the prayer. Assured of the intercession of Mary, whom we have so earnestly besought, we have recourse to our Lord, whom we look upon as the Victim of our sins, and whom we entreat to pardon us, to hear us, and to have mercy on us. We address our closing supplications to Him, because it is to Him, the beginning and the end of all things, that we should address the beginning and the end of all the homage we pay to His saints.

APPLICATION.

Understanding how beautifully expressive is this prayer, how eminently adapted it is to keep alive in our souls the fervor of holiness, and excite in our hearts sentiments of piety and confidence, let us recite it with the greatest devotion.

Let us be attentive to the meaning of everything we utter; to those beautiful and glorious titles of Mary, as well as to our own supplication, which is so often repeated without a change of form, because it sufficiently expresses all our wants.

Let us joyfully and fervently extol the prerogatives, the virtues and the patronage of Mary. Ah! what should afford greater pleasure to children than thus to praise their Mother, or to weak and miserable creatures than to solicit the goodness and mercy of her who holds in her hands the treasures of Heaven! "My sisters," said St. Chantal, to her Religious, "you see how we find in Mary everything we need. We want grace; she is the 'Mother of divine grace.' We stand in need of wisdom; she is the 'Seat of wisdom.' We need an asylum against the chastisements of divine justice; she is the 'Refuge of sinners.' We require assistance, and she is the 'Help of Christians.'"

Let us enter into the spirit of these words of a saint so enlightened in all the duties of a spiritual life. Let us recite the Litany under a deep conviction of the wants of our soul and a confidence in Mary's willingness and power to relieve all our necessities if we only ask her with faith, fervor, and trust. Let us overlook nothing that can contribute to secure her protection, which will prove an inexhaustible source of every blessing, and by which, victorious over our spiritual enemies, and partakers of divine grace, we shall advance from virtue to virtue, until we shall be admitted into those blessed mansions where we shall behold, glorify, and praise her whom on earth we thus supplicate. "Queen of all saints, pray for us."

PRAYER.

"Vouchsafe, O Holy Virgin, to obtain for me the grace that I may worthily praise you, and grant that I may prevail over all your enemies."

Would, O divine Mother, that I could honor and invoke you as your most devoted servants have done, and, like them, merit to be deemed worthy of your loving protection; for that protection will prove a bulwark against the assaults of the devil, an overflowing fountain of grace, a gentle breeze that will bear me in safety over the dangerous sea of life and conduct me to the haven of a happy eternity. Amen.

See *Résumés*, page 455.

89.—ON THE MEMORARE.

Then they returned and cried to thee, and thou heardest from heaven, and deliveredst them many times in thy mercies.—2 ESDRAS ix. 28.

CONSIDERATION.

ST. BERNARD had the most unwavering and the most entire confidence in Mary. "O Blessed Virgin," he exclaimed, "if there be any one living who can call to mind his having invoked you in his necessities, without being heard, let such a one refuse to extol your mercy." He implored her assistance from the very depth and fervor of his heart, saying to her, under every form of language: "I prostrate myself at thy feet, O Holy Virgin, my Mediatrix and my Queen, addressing my humble supplications to you, which I know you will not reject."

Such are the thoughts and sentiments of this great servant of Mary, which form the groundwork, or the basis, of the MEMORARE, for this reason called the prayer of St. Bernard, and which came into general use, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, through the zealous efforts of a holy priest named Father Bernard.

This man of God belonged to a family which the world called distinguished; but, for the love of Jesus Christ, he cast behind him all worldly hopes, having no other ambition than that of being "a poor priest," and, as such, he employed himself, with a most heroic abnegation, in relieving, consoling, and assisting the sick, prisoners, and like objects of Christian compassion. Ascribing to Mary his conversion, as well as his vocation to the ecclesiastical state, he never ceased, in the transports of his gratitude, to give her homage and praise, and he embraced every occasion to inspire those whom he visited with the same sentiments of confidence and love for Mary which he experienced himself.

The MEMORARE being admirably adapted to further his pious wishes, he had it translated into several languages and circulated it with a holy profusion. His efforts were crowned with the most signal manifestations of the protection of Mary, and realized the most abundant and unexpected fruits. His grand purpose was accomplished when, having induced a sinner to join him in reciting the MEMORARE, the latter, yielding to the influence of divine grace, was converted on the spot.

From that time the MEMORARE has been recommended and propagated by the Church throughout the Christian world, and everywhere have the faithful experienced its wonderful efficacy. Ah! to how many souls has it not proved a living fountain of light, strength, consolation, and conversion!

From even a moment's meditation on this beautiful prayer, we can at once discover that its words were dictated by the Spirit of God, and that it were impossible that it could not touch the heart of Mary. How, indeed, could she reject a prayer in which we invoke her holy name; in which we proclaim her divine maternity, her virginal purity, her goodness, her power, and her protection; in which we say to her, that our confidence in her rests upon the experience of ages, all of which have proclaimed that they have never invoked her in vain; in which, addressing her as our Mother, and humbling ourselves at her feet from a knowledge of our unworthiness, we beseech her to despise not our supplications, but graciously hear and grant the same!

No, no, we are not permitted to doubt that such sentiments, if they come from a sincere and fervent heart, will bring down upon us the protection of that good Mother, for we can conceive of none more true, more appropriate or more holy.

"*Remember, O Most Holy Virgin, that it has never been heard of in any age, that those who implored thy powerful protection were abandoned by thee.*" How glorious to you, O most merciful mediatrix, is the silence of those who have invoked your intercession, and what joy it should bring to your heart, whose goodness toward us it so eloquently proclaims! From the day when you were appointed our Mother, you have never, for a moment, ceased to fulfil all the functions of that office of mercy with the most maternal solicitude and the most generous liberality. For ages, the Christian world has prayed to you, and, during all that time, not a single voice has been heard alleging that you have not assisted all who have implored your help.

Neither shall my voice ever give utterance to such an assertion; the past is the best answer for the future, for your goodness is inexhaustible as your power is unlimited; and thus I will experience what all have experienced who have had recourse to you.

Animated with this unfaltering confidence, I have recourse to thee, O Virgin of virgins, O my most tender mother; a confidence reposing on my faith in your goodness, your power and your love for us, as well as on the experience of all ages and of all Christian countries; a confidence with which all the saints were animated, and which inspired St. Liguori to sing: "Who has ever had recourse to you, O Holy Virgin, without receiving succor? Ah, heaven and earth shall sooner pass away than that you shall fail to assist those who humbly implore your help."

Yes, I am assured of this: You will not suffer that I shall be the first, or, rather, the only one who has invoked your aid without receiving help. I will pray to you, knowing that you will hear me favorably.

Ah! too well do I know that I do not merit your protection; but I also know that, like your divine Son, you will not reject an humble and a contrite heart; that, as Queen of mercy, you will have compassion on us in proportion to our miseries. And it is for this reason that, *groaning under the burden of my sins*, confounded at the sight of the iniquities which defile my poor soul, *I throw myself prostrate at your feet*, there to shed tears of repentance and beg you to reconcile me with my God, re-establish me in His favor, and obtain for me the grace of final perseverance.

Vouchsafe, then, O Mother of the Incarnate Word, who hast so much power over the heart of thy divine Son, not only *not to reject*, but *favorably to receive and hear my prayers.*

You will thus show that you are always filled with goodness toward us; that our confidence in you is not misplaced; that it is a source of happiness and glory to you to extend your mercy to us; that nothing more pleases your loving heart than to interpose between us and your divine Son, in order that you may obtain for us, not only the pardon of our sins, but also the necessary grace to escape the dangers that surround us, and conduct us to the haven of eternal peace.

APPLICATION.

Let us be careful never to recite this admirable prayer, but with that faith, attention, and fervor which it cannot fail to excite in the pious heart; and let us be profoundly penetrated with those sentiments of confidence and humility of which it is so beautiful an expression.

Let us recite it often, but especially in our moments of temptation, tepidity, and trial. When the devil tries to entice us to sin, and we feel our strength giving way; when our heart is overcast with sadness, discouragement or indifference, let us renew our confidence in Mary, and have recourse to that good Mother, with all the ardor of which our souls are capable. Let us cast ourselves at her feet and conjure her, in the name of her glory, not to forsake us; from the depths of our heart, let us recite that prayer which has been addressed to her by so many millions of her servants, all of whom she has vouchsafed to hear.

Let us teach the MEMORARE to our pupils; let us inspire them with the greatest love for it; let us explain to them its meaning, so that their hearts may be penetrated with the sentiments that it expresses, that they may recite it devoutly, not only at the prescribed hours, but on all occasions, when they may particularly need the protection of the Most Blessed Virgin.

Imitating the example of the holy priest, whose burning zeal first made it known to the Catholic world, let us urge every person with whom we may be brought in contact, devoutly to recite it, but especially those who seem to us to be separated from God. Let us ourselves recite it for their intention as well as for that of sinners in general. Let us earnestly beseech the divine Mother of the Incarnate Word, that, by her powerful protection, she would rescue all such from the abyss into which they have fallen, and guide them, afterward, in the path of justice, which alone leads to eternal life.

PRAYER.

Remember, O most merciful Virgin Mary, that it is unheard of, that any one flying to thee for protection, imploring thy help, or seeking thy intercession, was ever forsaken. Animated by this unerring confidence, I hasten to thee, Virgin of virgins; I fly to thee, O sweet Mother; a wretched sinner, I prostrate myself groaning at thy feet; despise not my prayer, O Mother of the Divine Word, but graciously hear and grant the same. Amen.

See *Résumés*, p. 456.

90. — ON THE SUB TUUM.

Thy help is only in me. — OSEE xiii. 9.

CONSIDERATION.

THE SUB TUUM is a prayer on which we cannot meditate too much, for although it consists of but few words, it contains the most admirable eulogium on the glories of Mary, and the most profitable instruction on our miserable state in this pilgrimage of tears, and our absolute need of her charitable protection.

We first say, "*We fly to thy protection, O holy Mother of God*," and thus proclaim her super-eminent sanctity, her divine maternity, and the mission of mercy she exercises among men. In calling her "holy," we exalt her purity, her obedience, her humility, her wisdom, as well as all the virtues by which she pleased God and merited the distinguished, the incomparable honor to which she was raised. In styling her "Mother of God," we celebrate the prerogative which is the foundation and the cause of all the others with which she has been favored, and by exalting the one we praise all. In speaking of her protection, we recall the goodness she manifests toward us, the unlimited power she exercises over the Heart of her divine Son, and the maternal solicitude with which she watches over the interests of our souls.

We then say to her: *"Despise not our petitions in our necessities."* We here acknowledge that we stand in need of her assistance; that we are poor, weak, miserable creatures, and that through her we can obtain all necessary assistance in the trials that beset us.

We now add: *"But deliver us from all danger."* Ah! we are here reminded of the dangers that surround us; dangers both numerous and formidable, proceeding from the devil, who never ceases to plot our ruin; from the world, which flaunts before our eyes its pomps and its vanities; from our passions, which beset us on every side, and are ever inclining us to evil; dangers, all of which we can overcome by the protection of the most holy Virgin, who, if we only supplicate her in the right spirit, will obtain for us the graces we stand in need of, and will thus prove our defense and our safety.

"In all our conflicts with the powers of hell, we shall come off victorious," says St. Liguori, "if, throwing ourselves at the feet of Mary, we say to her, with the Church: 'We fly to thy protection, O holy Mother of God.' Oh! how many victories have been achieved by using this short but efficacious prayer!"

How deserving, then, of our esteem is the SUB TUUM — so glorious to Mary, so expressive of our necessities, so eminently proper when begging the assistance of our good Mother. It is, besides, a prayer which the Church frequently makes use of in her liturgy, particularly on occasions of public necessity, and one that was especially dear to our venerable founder. We recite it at the end of most of our community exercises, in order that we may thank her for her protection during the prayer we are finishing, as well as solicit its continuance during the one that is to follow.

But let us not content ourselves with the consideration of its excellence; let us penetrate more deeply into the thoughts and sentiments to which it gives such beautiful expression. "*We fly to thy protection, O Holy Mother of God.*" We know that you are all-powerful with your adorable Son, who grants you all you ask, and even anticipates your wishes; we know also that, being our Mother, you are filled with tenderness, goodness, and love for us, and that you delight in helping us. It is why we fly to thee with confidence, O Mother of mercy. "*Ah! despise not our petitions in our necessities.*" Unhappy children of Eve, we send up our sighs to thee in this valley of tears, and we beseech thee to exercise thy maternal solicitude in our behalf. You are rich, O holy Virgin, who hold in your hands the key of the treasures of heaven, while we, alas! are poor and miserable. You dispose of all the favors of light, strength, and fervor which God imparts to men, and we are blind, weak, and without the relish as well as without the courage that are necessary to the practice of virtue. Ah! vouchsafe to help us and bestow on us, according to our necessities, the precious blessings which are at your disposal.

"*But deliver us from all danger.*" Preserve us from abusing divine grace, of which we are in so much danger, and the consequences of which are so deplorable; preserve us from tepidity, from that spiritual languor which is so injurious to a soul, particularly to a soul consecrated to God; preserve us from sin and from every occasion of sin; preserve us from faithlessness, even in small matters; from irregularities; from everything that can grieve either your heart or that of Jesus.

Grant that, through your intercession, we may avoid all the snares of our enemies, visible and invisible, and that, escaping all their wicked designs, we may worthily serve God all the days of our lives.

Save us from the shafts aimed at us by the spirits of darkness. *O glorious Virgin*, exalted above all creatures, add still more to the splendor of your glory by continuing to triumph over the devil by crushing the head of the old serpent, by snatching from his power the souls that have given themselves up to him, and by preventing him from seducing those of your servants.

O blessed Virgin, we tender you our most grateful and heartfelt thanks for the blessings which your intercession has brought upon us, and we supplicate you to continue your merciful protection over us, until we attain to the possession of the Sovereign Good, when, with the angels and saints, we shall praise you forever in the heavenly Jerusalem.

APPLICATION.

Let us recite the SUB TUUM with sentiments worthy of that sublime prayer, that is, with humility, distrust of ourselves, confidence in the protection of Mary, admiration of the greatness of that divine Mother, and gratitude for the blessings she has bestowed upon us.

Let us humble ourselves most profoundly at the thought of our sins, of our tepidity in the service of God, of everything that is in us unworthy a Christian, a Religious, and a privileged child of Mary. Let us remember that, being nothing but weakness, and surrounded by enemies numerous, powerful, implacable, and bent on our ruin, we have the greatest need of the protection of the Most Powerful Virgin, through whose assistance we shall overcome their assaults and defeat all their artifices.

That protection will not be wanting if we ask it in the proper spirit. Is not Mary our Mother, and can a mother abandon her children? Is not her immaculate heart the most perfect image of the Heart of Jesus? And, like His, does it not most ardently desire that, applying to ourselves the merits of the redemption, we may raise ourselves from the darkness of vice, escape the snares of hell, and advance from virtue to virtue, until we attain to that degree of perfection to which we are called?

Ah! who does not know, from his own experience, how faithfully, how earnestly, how anxiously our good Mother comes to the help of those who invoke her! Let her countless favors be a motive for reposing in her the most unlimited confidence, and a subject of the most affectionate and profound thanks!

Let us offer to her a true devotion of praise and benediction. Among our other practices, let us piously recite the SUB TUUM, that we may thus thank her, in a special manner, for her assistance during the exercise we are finishing, and place the fruits thereof in her keeping, and also that we may experience a like assistance in the exercise we are about to commence. These pious acts of gratitude and prayer will draw upon us, in a still greater degree, the protection of the glorious and ever-blessed Virgin, through whom we receive all the gifts of grace, and by whom, if we really desire it, we shall be conducted to everlasting glory.

PRAYER.

O holy Virgin, Mother of my God, and my tender Mother, often have I recourse to your protection; let me entreat you to exercise it in my regard. Ah! vouchsafe to accept my supplications, and extend to me that protection which your good and compassionate Heart may prompt, and of which my poor soul stands so much in need.

Assist me, O Mother of mercy, during the whole course of my life, and particularly at the hour of my death. Ah! when I shall have finished my exile here below, receive me in your arms, plead my cause before the tribunal of the Sovereign Judge, so that I may be admitted into the ranks of those who, saved by your protection, celebrate your praise in transports of eternal gratitude.

See *Résumés*, page 456.

91.—ON THE PRAYER, O DOMINA MEA.

Rule thou over us, and thy Son, because thou hast delivered us.—JUDGES viii. 23.

CONSIDERATION.

THE prayer, O DOMINA MEA, which we recite after morning prayers, and at the end of the Rosary, offers us a useful subject of meditation, for it admirably expresses our dependence on Mary, our confidence in her protection, our consecration to her service, and the disposition of our will to perform every act of our life in accordance with the wishes of her divine Son.

"*O Holy Mary, Sovereign Queen,*" we say to her, and thus, in the very first words, we offer to her the pious homage of our dependence; we proclaim her our Queen, our Mistress, our Lady, whose servants and subjects we esteem it an honor to be accounted; we praise her holiness and invoke her name, blessed and glorious among the names of all pure creatures.

We then say to her: "*I commend my soul and body to thee, and place myself under thy loving care, thy special protection, and in the very bosom of thy tender mercy.*" Her greatness not only does not prevent us from having recourse to her to ask her aid, but it even encourages us to do so with greater confidence. Queen of Heaven and earth, Mary is, at the same time, our Mother, and a Mother to whom no other can be compared; a Mother who is filled with love, tenderness, and compassion for us, and whose solicitude for us never slumbers; a Mother whose arms are always open to receive us, and on whose bosom we can always find consolation in our troubles, assistance in our struggles, and a refuge in tribulation.

Yes, let us go to her with confidence, and say to her: O Queen of angels, Mother of my Saviour, was it not to protect me that you have been raised to so high a dignity? In whose favor will you exercise your power of intercession, if not in favor of your child, who beseeches you not to forsake him?

After having honored Mary, and renewed our confidence in her merciful goodness, we consecrate ourselves to her in these words: "*I commend my soul and body to thee, and place myself under thy loving care, thy special protection, and in the very bosom of thy tender mercy, to-day, every day of my life, and at the hour of my death. Into thy hands I commit all my hopes and consolations, all my trials and miseries, my life, and my last end.*" Let us notice the chief characteristics of this consecration, which, indeed, may be considered as the principal feature of this beautiful prayer that forms the subject of our meditation.

We place ourselves under the protection of Mary "*to-day*," from the present moment, for we know that we are always in need of divine grace, and, consequently, of the assistance of her through whom grace is given to us; we know that the enemies of our salvation never relax their efforts, and that the moment when Mary shall cease to defend us against their assaults will be the moment of our overthrow.

We place ourselves under her protection for "*every day*" of our lives. We do this because that protection is indispensable to us in whatever situation we may be placed; and because the same motives that actuate us to-day, in placing ourselves under the protection of that all-powerful and merciful mediatrix, will compel us to ask her assistance to-morrow, and as long as we live.

We consecrate ourselves to her with a view, more particularly, *to the hour of our death.* Oh! how wise it is in us, each day, to implore her for that hour, when, to us, time will end and eternity begin; that hour which will be the last for the exercise of mercy, and after which the reign of rigorous justice will begin! We place in the hands of this Blessed Virgin *all our hopes and all our consolations, all our trials and miseries, the course and the close of our lives.* Our consecration is general in its object, while, at the same time, we ask her special protection, no matter in what circumstances we may find ourselves placed. Knowing how great is the goodness, the tenderness, the devotion, the love of our good Mother, we offer to her all that we have and all that we are. We deposit in her heart, always ready to receive the effusions of ours, everything that is a cause of joy or sorrow, of happiness or misery.

After having committed to the hands of Mary all our interests for time and eternity, we ask the grace of living as becomes those who are consecrated to her, of offering up to her, as faithful servants and affectionate children, all our faculties of soul and body, of leading holy and exemplary lives, such as she desires, or rather such as will be pleasing to her divine Son.

"*So that, through thy blessed protection and merits,*" we then add, "*all my actions may be so directed and disposed as to be in perfect conformity to thy most holy will and to that of thy adorable Son.*" Here is, at once, both a supplication and an obligation. In beseeching Mary to intercede for us, and obtain for us, through her merits, the graces necessary for our sanctification, we promise to correspond to those graces, to act, in all things, according to her will, which is also the will of Jesus Christ Himself, to conform, in everything, to the directions she gave to the waiters at the marriage-feast of Cana, and which comprise all perfection: "Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye." *

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*St. John ii. 5.

Happy are those who, entering fully into the spirit of this prayer, recite it daily. They give glory to the Most Blessed Virgin; they dispose her to give a willing ear to their supplications, and to consider their interests as her own; they assure themselves of her protection, and obtain, through her, the most precious graces; they renew, each time they recite it, their good dispositions, thus bringing forth, throughout their lives, fruits truly meritorious for Heaven, and rendering themselves worthy of those heavenly mansions where Jesus Christ, to whom they are consecrated, shall forever reign in eternal glory.

APPLICATION.

Do we recite the prayer, O Domina Mea, frequently, and do we endeavor to recite it with the dispositions necessary to insure its efficacy?

Do we say it with attention and piety, and stir up in our hearts those sentiments that should be in such beautiful unison with the words we utter?

Do we recite it, penetrated with the glories of Mary, her power with God, her goodness, her love, her tenderness for us, her desire to assist us in our necessities; with the motives which should impel us to seek her aid, to choose her as our guide, and place ourselves under her protection?

Do we recite it with the intention of consecrating ourselves in truth to Mary; of offering up to her all we have and all we are; of considering ourselves, thenceforth, as belonging to her, and of using all our powers of mind and of body only in accordance with her will? Do we recall to mind, during the day, and particularly in moments of temptation, the consecration which we have made of our mind, soul and body to the immaculate Virgin, to the Queen of angels, whose virtues should be imitated by all who call themselves her servants, and who sincerely desire to experience the effects of her protection?

In a word, do we recite the prayer, O DOMINA MEA, with the firm resolution of realizing, as far as depends on us, the words with which it closes, to do nothing except what is conformable to the will of Jesus and Mary?

These were the dispositions with which it was recited by St. Aloysius Gonzaga, that angel of piety, with the sentiments of whose heart it was in such perfect unison, and who loved it with such ardent affection that he could never cease reciting and repeating it. Let us imitate the example of that admirable model of the children of Mary. Let us pray to the glorious Mother of God; but let our prayers come from the heart with all the fervor which the knowledge of her power and goodness, as well as of our own necessities, in this life of misery and conflict, is capable of inspiring. Especially let us pray to her with a firm resolution of co-operating with the graces which we solicit through her intercession, and by means of which we shall advance in the path of perfection, until we reach the blissful abodes of salvation and glory.

PRAYER.

O Holy Mary, Sovereign Queen, I commend my soul and body to thee, and place myself under thy loving care, thy special protection, and in the very bosom of thy tender mercy, to-day, every day of my life, and at the hour of my death. Into thy hands, I commit all my hopes and consolations, all my trials and miseries, my life and my last end, so that, through thy blessed protection and merits, all my actions may be so directed and disposed as to be in perfect conformity to thy most holy will and to that of thy adorable Son. Amen.

See *Résumés*, page 457.

92. — SCAPULAR OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation. — ISAIAS lxi. 10.

CONSIDERATION.

THE Scapular is, properly speaking, a part of the religious habit that is in use among several Congregations. In its more general signification, however, it means an object of pious veneration composed of two small pieces of cloth attached by strings, and worn on the person as a sign of devotion to our Blessed Lord or to His Most Holy Mother.

That which is called the Scapular of the Immaculate Conception, or, more commonly, the blue Scapular, dates from the seventeenth century. To establish it and propagate its use, our Lord chose the venerable Ursula, foundress of the Theatine Nuns. Appearing to her, with His Most Holy Mother clothed in a celestial robe of dazzling whiteness, over which she wore a garment of a blue color, He made known to her that He had chosen her to establish, under the title of the Immaculate Conception, a religious order, the members of which were to wear a habit of the same color and form as that in which the Blessed Virgin showed herself to her at that moment, and He promised her that all persons who should enter that order would receive special graces and a superabundance of spiritual treasures.

Inspired by charity and zeal, the venerable Ursula humbly and earnestly besought the Most Holy Virgin to extend those privileges to all those who, without belonging to the order, should, nevertheless, desire to make profession of a sincere devotion toward her immaculate conception, observe chastity according to their state, and wear the little blue Scapular. Her prayer was heard, and she was assured of it by seeing, in the same ecstacy, a multitude of angels scattering here and there over the world large numbers of these Scapulars. This apparition took place on the Feast of the Purification, in the year 1616. From that time the practice of wearing the blue Scapular has spread throughout the Church, and has everywhere produced the most precious fruits of sanctification.

This pious practice, which has been encouraged by many Popes, and especially by Pius IX., devoted, as he most eminently is, to the immaculate conception of Mary, is highly beneficial to those who are faithful to it, and are truly animated with the spirit it breathes.

By means of this Scapular they are affiliated with the Order of Theatine Nuns, and share in the fruits of all the good that is accomplished by that order, as well as of all the faithful who are united by the same bond to that congregation so devoted to Mary. It secures for them the protection of the Most Blessed Virgin, who esteems it a happiness to assist, during life, but particularly at the hour of their death, those who honor her in her immaculate conception.

It also affords them the means of gaining, either for themselves or for the suffering souls in purgatory, many and precious indulgences. It is a promise, on their part, to lead holy lives, as well as a source of those graces that they will need in fulfilling that promise.

Oh! what spiritual treasures are thus placed in our hands! How many masses, prayers, penances, works of piety and zeal, in the fruits of which we are invited to participate! And, again, how this pious practice draws down upon us the salutary effects of the kindness and liberality of our good Mother! How it gives us strength to resist temptations, and to act, under all circumstances and at all times, as become the true servants of Mary, conceived without sin!

The devotion of the Scapular of the Immaculate Conception, so beneficial to those who practice it, is, nevertheless, one of the easiest, for it requires no other exterior conditions than to receive it from a priest empowered to give it, and constantly to wear it, as directed, as a badge of our consecration to Mary.

Still, although we may belong to the association of the blue Scapular, on fulfilling the two conditions just specified, and thus become entitled to a share in all the spiritual favors which are attached to it, yet that devotion will not produce in us all its fruits unless we are imbued with its spirit, and correspond, in our heart, with what we outwardly profess by wearing the livery of the Most Holy Virgin.

The Scapular is a symbol of the virtues which should regulate our conduct; it is a badge by which we signify our consecration to the immaculate Mary, and it, consequently, imposes on us the obligation to live as true children of Mary, as worthy servants of the Queen of virgins; it is a sign of our union of prayer and intention with all who wear it with us, and with those who belong to the religious order to which it owes its origin, and that union should be real. It is a pledge of our love for Mary, of our zeal in her devotion, of our veneration for her greatness and prerogatives, and especially for that of her Immaculate Conception and entire exemption from sin. Now, this should not be a delusive pledge.

The special end which every one who receives this Scapular should propose to himself is purity of life, as well as perseverance in a tender and filial devotion towards Mary, conceived without sin. Let us not forget that to wear this holy livery is to make a public profession of our intention to lead a life of purity, to follow in the footsteps of the Immaculate Virgin, to be devoted to her entirely and forever. It is to testify that we wish to honor her in her immaculate conception, to love her with all our heart as the most tender of mothers; to have recourse to her in all our necessities; to place ourselves under her protection, and to remain steadfast until we shall have received the crown promised to those who persevere to the end.

APPLICATION.

Let us praise God for having established this means of honoring His most holy Mother, and procuring for us so many precious advantages. Let us cherish, from the inmost depths of our hearts, this devotion, so holy in its origin, its object, and its end, and let nothing be dearer to us than to foster and preserve its holy spirit.

Let us bear constantly in mind that we are consecrated to Mary, and that, consequently, all we have—our thoughts, words, actions, and desires — should conform to what she requires of us. Let us especially think of it in moments of temptation and trial. Let us, then, take our Scapular in our hands, renew, from our inmost soul, our consecration to the Queen of virgins, and beg her to remember that we belong to her, and to vouchsafe to save us from the enemies of our salvation.

Let us conduct ourselves, under all circumstances, as loving children and zealous servants of Mary. Let us prove, in our lives, that we are wholly devoted to her; that we love her, next to Jesus, with all our heart; and that we desire, with all the ardor we are capable of feeling, that she may be known, loved, and praised. Let us labor to raise up faithful servants to her among the pupils who are confided to our care. Let us omit no favorable opportunity to imbue their tender hearts with sentiments of devotion towards the most merciful Virgin, and impress on them the great privileges they can secure by being invested with the holy Scapular, to which end we should supply them with all the necessary means.

Let us unite in prayer with all who are devoted to Mary, particularly with such as wear this badge of their consecration to her glory. Let us strive to gain the numerous indulgences granted to those associated in the confraternity of the blue Scapular. The Church permits us to draw abundantly from her treasures: let us draw them for ourselves; let us also draw them for the suffering souls in purgatory whom we can so greatly assist, and who, from the midst of the flames that consume them, cry to us not to forget them.

Let us prove ourselves worthy to wear the Scapular, that pledge of devotion to the Immaculate Virgin. We shall thus render to that Mother an homage of piety that cannot but prove agreeable to her and assure us of her protection. We will render it to her every instant of our lives, and thus be certain of rendering it to her at the hour of our death. Invested with this sacred livery, we shall close our career in this vale of tears. Ah! can we doubt that Mary will be with us when the final struggle shall come, and that she will supplicate her divine Son to recognize us in that holy livery, and open to us the mansions of eternal life?

PRAYER.

O holy Virgin, Queen of angels and of men, who being Mother of my God, has vouchsafed to become my Mother also, receive me in the number of your privileged children. Ah! permit me not, I beseech you, ever to prove myself unworthy of that great privilege, or forfeit a title so glorious to me. In giving me your Scapular, you give me a precious pledge of your love; grant that, by worthily wearing it, I may give you the best evidence of my devotion and gratitude, so that when my last hour shall come, I may be received into the company of the saints to join them in celebrating your goodness and glory throughout the ages of eternity. Amen.

See *Résumés*, page 457.

THE END.

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